

JEANNE'S HOUSE PARTY



ALICE ROSS COLVER



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"I'M SIMPLY THRILLED," SAID CAROL

JEANNE'S HOUSE PARTY

BY

ALICE ROSS COLVER

Author of "Jeanne," the "Babs Books"

*Illustrated by
J. M. Clifton*

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Jeanne's House Party

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INTRODUCTION

FRIENDS of "Jeanne" who followed her adventures out of a warring country into America where, though there was peace, there was apparently no friend to aid her in her poverty and loneliness, may perhaps be glad to read of her safely sheltered for a summer in a cosy cottage in Vermont with her beloved new Mama.

But even here, for all the loveliness of her surroundings, Jeanne finds trouble too, though of a different kind. Her three cousins, who are to be her guests for the entire vacation, are all girls of different temperaments and upbringing. It is not conceivable that they should live harmoniously until the difficult business of adjustment has taken place. The necessity for discovering and meeting each girl's need Jeanne feels falls entirely on her shoulders, but she is aided in her efforts by other unexpected guests so that after a few weeks of strain you will find "Jeanne's House Party" voted a success by all.

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Jeanne's House Party

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST GUEST

A SLIM figure in a black bathing suit trimmed in bright yellow emerged from the cool shadows of the cottage and stood for a moment on the broad verandah looking at the scene before her.

Lake Sunnapine, a deep clear blue, lay motionless under the hot summer sun. It looked, Jeanne thought, like a jewel, a sapphire, perhaps, set in the close embrace of low surrounding hills. They swept in gentle lines down to the very shore, and because they were densely wooded with evergreens, there hung always in the air a soft fragrance.

Jeanne drew a long breath of delight. It was perfect, this place. Simply perfect. Her look moved from the lake to the line of attractive cottages set in a horseshoe about an open

field. They snuggled back among the trees, some of them so hidden from view that only sounds of voices and music in the daytime or twinkling lights at night revealed that they were there. Jeanne's, or rather, "Mother Stafford's" cottage (for Jeanne had been adopted by Mrs. Stafford during the war when she had been left an orphan in France), was happily located on the highest point of ground at the curve of the shoe. From here one could obtain the best view of the lake out over the "green," as it was called. And here, too, there was more sunshine, for behind this cottage the woods abruptly stopped and a few paces to the rear of the kitchen door was the "back road" to the village. This openness before and behind admitted sunlight all day long, while the other cottages were darkened by surrounding woods until afternoon.

Mrs. Stafford's cottage had another advantage of being removed from its neighbors sufficiently to insure absolute privacy. On one side she had left her property naturally wooded as she had found it. A small trail led to the next house on her right. On the other side an arm of the lake cut in. This had been dammed

up so that a boat house could be built and a little private swimming pool made, that was easily reached from her own home. The "front road" from the village, which followed the inlet and the shore up to the Point of Pines Colony, turned in at the first cottage and swept around in front of them all, had to cross a rustic bridge to the right of Mrs. Stafford's boat house before it reached the next place.

A halloo from the shore stopped Jeanne from her contemplation of the place still quite new to her. She waved her hand in response and then ran lightly down the steps to follow the path through the center of the green to the beach.

She was entirely unconscious of the eyes that were on her as she moved through the flowery field, for to those people the story of her brave escape alone from France to America was still new, while to her it belonged to a forgotten past. She was still dreaming, still absorbed in a fresh wonder at the beauty of the place and a tremor of excitement at the realization that soon—soon—she would have three other girls to share it with her. Would they love it as she

did? Would they love her as she hoped to love them? Would it be a summer of joy, fun and friendship?

On the beach she paused smiling at everybody she knew. And in the few days that she had been here she had come to know nearly everyone. The babies and children turned to her as flowers turn to sunshine, demanding a share of her interested attention, sure of her generous and instant enthusiasm. The older people, to whom Jeanne gave an old-fashioned deference, as eager and warm as it was polite, nodded their heads in approval as she passed them with a greeting. And the young people, who were stretched out in all the informal attitudes of youth on the dock, could not have paid her a higher compliment than to call to her that they had waited half an hour for her, delaying their own plunge until she should come.

“But you should not have.” Jeanne’s quaint accent made them smile. She stood knee-deep in the water, golden curls peeping from under a black bandanna, framing a sensitive face of rare sweet beauty. “Why should you wait for me to come swim with you when I

cannot swim? But you are darlings, just the same," and she blew them a light kiss.

"Ho!" A boy of sixteen years leaped to his feet and ran to the end of the spring-board. "That didn't quite reach me, Jeanne. The breeze died before it got here. I'm coming to claim another!"

With which he dove into the lake and in a few seconds splashed in next to Jeanne. He stood upright beside her, flinging his wet yellow hair back from his forehead, his blue eyes laughing into hers. But he did not dare say, so close to her, what he had audaciously called from the dock. That was the thing about the little French-American that made her different. She possessed a daintiness, an aloofness, a reserve that set her apart.

"It's your hard luck that the breeze died," she told him. "Besides, that was for all of you, not you alone. Do you desire to give me another swimming lesson, Ted?"

Ted Van Tyne agreed enthusiastically. His twin brother, Victor, swam in to issue directions. Victor and Ted were as alike in appearance as two peas, the only difference being in the color of their eyes. Ted's were

blue, a clear deep blue like the lake. Victor's eyes were slate blue, with more gray in their depths. Both boys were tall and well set up, and Jeanne, struggling in the water, with Ted's hand under her chin, was conscious of a gladness that they were here, were her nearest neighbors, and were so nice.

There were four other young people, the Allen girls, Dorothy and Grace and their boy cousins visiting them. They lived in the end cottage of the horseshoe. Rodney and "Pink," as he was called, because of his tendency to blush, were out now in the deep water with the two girls and Jeanne, standing again, breathless and flushed, looked at them with envy. Everybody could swim. *Everybody*. From the tiniest toddler of three and a half to—to—well, Mother Stafford. Everybody but her stupid self. Would she never learn? Would Ruth know how? And Carol? And Bee?

"Thank you, boys, so much. You are kind. Go out now with the others and get your own swim. I must return."

"So soon? You've been in only five minutes."

“But you forget,” she reminded them, “Ruth Winfield comes on the four o’clock train. I’m going to meet her. Hark! That is mother blowing her whistle for me now.”

“Oh, to be sure. I’d forgotten. The second member of the Frolicsome Fair arrives to-day. Well, bring her down to the Club House to-night and we’ll pass judgment.”

Jeanne was thoughtful as she left the Van Tynes and walked back across the Green to the cottage. Ted’s words so carelessly spoken filled her with forebodings. For that was just what they did, these hard young things, they passed judgment. And if a girl or a boy didn’t conform, didn’t fit into the crowd, dared to be “different” or was so unfortunate as not to be able to help being different, he or she was an outcast. Should any of Jeanne’s cousins—Ruth or Carol or Bee—fail to measure up to the crowd’s standards, the results would be disastrous. It would be a calamity that no effort on Jeanne’s part could help or prevent. One or all of her guests would have a miserable summer. Jeanne could, of course, get the boys to dance with her friends, but what

fun is that if a girl knows a boy is dancing with her to please some other girl?

She paused at the foot of the steps to look back a little wistfully at the lake.

“ Oh, it's a perfect place,” she said again to herself. “ A perfect place for a perfect time. And I do so want everybody to have it! ”

She followed the path to the rear of the house, slipped off her black sandals and yellow stockings, dipped her feet in the pail of water set out by Katie and hurried through the dining-room to the stairs up to her room.

“ Hurry, Jeanne, darling.” Mrs. Stafford, on the verandah, called to her daughter.

“ Yes, mother dear.”

Jeanne truly meant to hurry but her head did get so full of thoughts and while they pushed and jostled about in their eagerness each to take front place, she would sit, one foot in her lap, the bath towel hanging from her idle hands, her wide brown eyes staring out through the window to the blue lake.

She didn't know sometimes which was the least real part of her life: those fear-filled moments when she saw her family and her home wiped out of existence by the Germans,

and herself starving and alone in a friendless world; the months when, with hope of a new home and a mother given her by big splendid "Dr. Jack" at the relief camp, she had struggled alone through countless difficulties and dangers to America and her new Mama; or these last few moments when, safe and sheltered at last, she was given care and love lavishly. There were moments when the luxury and ease of this new life seemed too good to be true, other moments when the terrors and trials she had undergone she felt must have been a bad dream.

To-day as she finally slipped into a white pleated wool skirt, and pulled a pale-green sweater over her head, this life was real. She was really Jeanne Lanier Stafford, fortunate adopted daughter of Mrs. Stafford, and the happy possessor of two homes, a winter one near New York and this summer cottage in the hills of Vermont. Imagine owning two rooms! Having them fitted up to suit her!

She glanced about the big square room as she brushed her fluffy hair. Two little gray beds side by side, gray bureau, two little gray rocking-chairs, a gray table and the prettiest

cretonne curtains at the windows,—background of a gray fence with tiny roses clambering over it. Who was going to share it with her? She couldn't, she simply couldn't decide.

Would it be Ruth, the girl she would meet in a few moments? Ruth Winfield, the oldest of a large family, about whom Mother Stafford remembered only “beautiful eyes and fat legs.” Ruth's letter had sounded nice, much, much nicer than Carol's. Jeanne frowned a little as she pinned a wee black bow at her throat and fastened a narrow black belt about her sweater. Carol she was quite sure she didn't care to have too close to her. Still, that wasn't fair, perhaps. Perhaps she ought to room with Carol King just because Carol was as alone and unused to being with large families and sisters as she was. Just because Carol had always had loads of money and nobody to share her possessions with her and might be a little difficult,—just because of that, perhaps Jeanne ought to be the one to room with her and not one of her guests.

But still there was Beatrice Kent, the niece named after darling Mother Stafford, and Bee

was Dr. Jack's own sister. Oh! she must room with Bee. They had so much to talk about. There were such mountains of things she wanted to ask Bee about Jack. And because of her letter of acceptance to the house party, so warmly enthusiastic and so genuine, Jeanne had felt more drawn to the little Western girl from Montana than to any of the others.

"But after all," she concluded, "after all, they're all nice. The thing to do is, as Mother said, to find their special nicenesses."

She snatched a small soft sport hat, green with a black quill thrust through it, from a nail on the wall, crushed it over her gleaming hair, and ran lightly down through the living-room, across the porch and down the path to the car in the road below.

"We'll just have time to get there," her mother said, but it was not reproof for Jeanne's lateness. Her tone held rather a tender understanding of the little girl who found it so difficult to do anything or get anywhere at an appointed time.

"I'm dreadful—but I get to thinking," Jeanne replied.

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The automobile and the train stopped at the ugly little station simultaneously. Jeanne, stepping out behind her mother, saw a solitary figure getting off the train, and her heart sank.

Was this Ruth? This stolid looking girl with the thick ankles, dumpy figure and unbecoming hat? Mother had remembered nothing about her but fine gray eyes and fat legs. Well, let's see the eyes then. Ah, they *were* fine. Jeanne, perhaps a little supersensitive beyond her years because of her experiences, felt swift reactions to people, and Ruth's gray eyes, so heavily and darkly fringed, woke in her an instant warmth, akin to pity. For in them lay a desperate appeal for friendliness. With genuine gladness, her hand went out to this stiff silent girl who was flushing most unbecomingly in her embarrassment, and into the depths of the eyes opposite her flashed for a second a fervent response, a dumb thanks. But the light was quickly shut out and Ruth, a little awkward and altogether silent, took her place in the car between her aunt and her cousin.

Mrs. Stafford kept the conversation going, for Jeanne, for all her sympathy, was not ex-

perienced enough to handle this situation. She did her best, however, with the enthusiasm and hope that something would touch and tingle Ruth to an answering openness. And all the time her mind was frantically hunting for easy topics, her eyes were registering with acute dismay various undisputable facts. Ruth's hair, though heavy, was oily and unbecomingly fixed. In her attempt to be modish, she had puffed it out over her ears, too far for her broad face. Her mouth was sullen and ——

Jeanne came out of her private thoughts with a jerk. This would never do. She must talk and she must remember those eyes. If Ruth would only let *them* speak, she herself might remain dumb forever.

But except for that first desperate appeal and flashing thanks, Ruth's face was set like a mask. With utter impassivity, she gazed at the waters of the channel, sparkling and dancing in the sun.

"Yes, it is pretty," she acquiesced.

"And you will love the cottage too. It's the only one painted white, and that, added to the fact that it's exactly at the center of the horse-shoe and a little higher than any of the others,

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makes it stand out. Here we are! Now you see, the road begins to curve in away from the lake, and goes up in front of all the houses. Yes, that's ours ——”

Jeanne was rattling on in a sort of frenzy. At last the car stopped before their deep verandah and she was able to find relief in action. She wondered if Ruth were appreciative of the shady porch with its swings and book-filled tables and comfortable chairs; if the cool gray living-room, with its warm scarlet chimney and gay Indian blankets flung over couch and piano, appealed to her. But Ruth passed by everything with set face, apparently seeing nothing, or else seeing everything in such confusion that she could register neither surprise nor pleasure.

She followed Jeanne up the stairs unconscious of the least little hesitation in Jeanne's manner.

“My room is here. Suppose you take this one until the other girls come, then Carol and Bee will have to choose between us.”

She said it lightly but Ruth's response shocked her.

“They'll both choose you.”

While it was pleasant it hurt and embarrassed Jeanne. She stood for a moment in utter silence, then happily gentle words came to her.

“Not if you will let us know you, Ruth, not if you won’t keep yourself all shut away behind your beautiful eyes—they *are* beautiful, you know.”

The dreadful moment had passed. Ruth, who could have bitten out her tongue in mortification, breathed again and Jeanne felt that somehow that little second of agony had opened the way for her. She kept on talking while she helped Ruth unpack and then another inspiration came to her.

“You must be awfully hot. There’d be time for a swim if you’d like to, before supper. Do you swim?”

Ruth’s heavy face lit up in a surprising way.

“Oh! I love to. Might I? I have my bathing suit right here. I thought ——”

“Aren’t you lucky to know how to? I struggle so hard. Puff and pant, and work as no one else seems to and I get nowhere. Yes, bring your suit. You can dress in the boat

house. There are rooms down there and you can go in off the dock, unless you'd rather go to the beach?"

But Ruth seemed as unwilling to meet people as Jeanne was to introduce her, so that five minutes later the new guest was diving from the dock of the Staffords' boat house.

The boat house was at the rear and left of the cottage. The lower floor held the boats. On the second floor were two bath houses, a bedroom for the chauffeur, a big glassed-in room which could be used for dances, and opening off this, a balcony overlooking the water.

Jeanne, sitting on the rail of the balcony, watched Ruth in silence. In her trim bathing suit, with her hair tucked under a scarlet cap she was rather good to look at. Her sturdy legs were a part of her sturdy body, and there was admiration for her in Jeanne's eyes as she cut clearly through the water with free strong strokes.

"You swim beautifully," she called down.

"I love it," Ruth laughed back, and the laugh showed strong even teeth.

"It must be all in her clothes and her hair,"

Jeanne thought, "She's almost good-looking now."

She left Ruth to dress alone in the boat house and by the time the girl had finished and returned to the house again, it was supper-time. A table was set on the porch and Jeanne and her mother, clad in their cool white, were waiting in a swing for their first guest to appear.

She came, in her shy, embarrassed way and sat down in a chair. Her dress was her prettiest new one, a pale green with white ruffles at the neck and elbows, and a wide white sash. But somehow the color was unbecoming to her dark oily complexion and the wide sash made her appear dumpier than ever. The difference between her and Jeanne, slim in her green and white, was a difference each of them felt. Ruth thought Jeanne reminded her of birch trees.

"Well, what about the dance to-night? Are you girls going? This little settlement boasts a club house, Ruth, my dear, a quite modest affair built down by the shore. But it seems to serve as a gathering place for dancers or inside picnics or card parties, and is in constant use."

"What do you do for music?"

"Victrola," Jeanne answered. "Do you play the piano?"

"A little."

Ted and Victor came over before the tea things were cleared away, and the introduction, usually a difficult moment for young people, was helped along by their identical looks. Jeanne, hearing Ruth laugh in honest confusion, breathed a little sigh of relief. Ruth was stiff but it might perhaps just be because of the newness of things. Possibly in a day or two it would have passed away.

But she was mistaken. Ruth's moment of self-forgetfulness was soon over. The twins, though alike in appearance, were utterly unlike in disposition. Ted was merry, sociable, quick-witted and gay. Victor was shy and sensitive and went about with an enormous chip on his shoulder.

It was characteristic of Ted that he appropriated Jeanne as his companion in the walk to the Club House and it was equally characteristic of Vic that he unsuccessfully made the best of a bad matter.

He and Ruth, their tongues and feet stum-

bling in their embarrassment, followed the gayer couple and entered rather solemnly and unhappily into the joys of the first dance. Finally Vic stopped and wiped a wet brow.

“It’s no good. I can’t dance. I can’t talk. As a social success I shine like a lump of mud. This dance is over, thank Heaven, I’ll get Ted. He’s got to do his share.”

He left Ruth burning with shame and anger, entirely misconstruing his last words which he had meant to put all the blame on himself. When Ted came he found her flushed and curt, silent except when some little remark of sarcasm came to her lips.

Ted, gallant and eager to please, nevertheless found Jeanne’s guest a stiff dose to swallow, and once again she was left with as quick a grace as was possible.

Jeanne, whirled about from dance to dance, watched with growing concern Ruth’s misery. Boys were introduced. Oh! yes! Jeanne saw to that. But the stupid things stood about and stood about until they saw a chance to turn about and run. Except for her first two dances and another agonizing one with

"Fatty"—the joke of the crowd—Ruth remained glued to her chair.

"Ted, please, just one more," Jeanne was pleading with him to approach Ruth a second time, when the Victrola with a groan and a whirr died in its tracks.

There was great commotion. Lamentations rose to the sky. The bare little dance hall rocked with concerted groans. Various and sundry embryo mechanics volunteered aid or information or both, but the Victrola concluded it had earned a decent death and not even a swan song could be ground from it.

It was only nine o'clock. A boy finally seated himself at the piano and calling upon the gods and the guests to note his unselfishness, he played for the next three dances. Then there was another pause, during which Jeanne went to Ruth.

"You said you played. Would you like to help us out? If everybody that could, would take turns ——"

"Oh, I'll play!" Ruth, impatiently, a little bitter smile at her mouth, went to the piano. The rest of the evening was a triumph for her.

She played beautifully, in perfect time, without any music.

“How do you do it?” Ted asked enthusiastically.

“I play by ear,” she replied shortly.

“Well, keep it up. It’s the best we’ve ever had. I move we pitch the Victrola in the lake.”

When the two girls said good-night that night at the doors of their rooms, Jeanne spoke out impulsively.

“That was dear of you, Ruth, to play all that time. Everybody was awfully appreciative.”

“Oh,” Ruth tried hard to keep her tone careless, but hurt and shame and bitterness would creep in—“I’m used to it. I’m always driven to it, sooner or later. Good-night.”

CHAPTER II

SHARP CORNERS

THE thin board partitions in the bedrooms did not go all the way to the ceiling. This was to insure free ventilation. So Jeanne, waking early the morning after Ruth's arrival, lay still in her bed, fearful of disturbing her guest. For an hour she lay there, slender white arms crossed under her head, her great eyes fixed on the ceiling.

The day loomed as long as a lifetime ahead of her for it was clear that getting on with Ruth was going to be difficult. Take the matter of last evening for instance. The thing to do was to overlook and forget as quickly as possible Ruth's failure to "make a hit." But Ruth herself wouldn't. She was edgy. All the prickly side of her nature seemed to be turned out. It was as though Jeanne were trying very carefully to walk around a table

without hitting its sharp corners, and every way she turned the table turned too, so that a sharp corner and she were always in painful contact.

She understood that some of Ruth's surliness was due to miserable self-consciousness, and the rest of it was due to the fact that her new clothes over which she had toiled so painstakingly, were neither pretty nor becoming in contrast to Jeanne's. And she suspected further, that Ruth was dreading to meet the new cousins still to come.

How much she dreaded it, Jeanne was never to know. But Ruth, waking early and lying still too, was shedding some tears over it, silent, bitter tears. She wished she hadn't come. She wished somebody would get terribly sick in her family and she would be needed at home. She wished she might never have to see Ted and Victor again. Especially Victor. No, especially Ted, because Ted and she did get along, scraped a conversation somehow and yet there had only been the one dance.

Why was it that her tongue wouldn't say a thing when she wanted it to, and when she didn't want to, it blurted out the worst things

that could be thought of? Why need she be fat and ugly and stupid, too? For she was stupid. She knew how to cook. Oh yes. But what girl wanted to know how to cook when she was fifteen? She wanted to know how to talk. And if she didn't learn soon it would be too late. She'd be set. That was the way she put it. Set for a dummy.

She had come to the house party tremulous beneath a stolid exterior; quivering with beautiful bright colored dreams, vague enough except that they included and depended upon a miraculous change in herself. Somehow, by merely moving her physical self from one place to another, she was to become a different person. None here knew she was dull and cross and the work-horse at home. With her new clothes to help her, she was to burst from the chrysalis a butterfly. She was to talk and laugh and be gay and alluring as she had never been, had always wanted to be, and secretly believed she could be.

But things hadn't gone right from the start. The enthusiastic little speech she had planned, and rehearsed so many times in the train, died in her throat. She remembered nothing but

her thick ankles as she saw Jeanne's pretty slender feet when she jumped from the automobile. And then her clothes ——! She had thought them so darling at home. But here they were all wrong. Not dresses. Sport clothes were the thing. Gay sweaters and squashy hats and pleated skirts and low heeled shoes. Ruth, teetering about in her high heeled black slippers at the dance, had been most uncomfortable and realized she looked it.

Well, here she was. That was the point, the tragedy of it all. Here she was. She, Ruth Winfield, a dull cross work-horse. No butterfly about it. She hadn't changed and now she couldn't change. Jeanne and Aunt Bee had seen her, had known her for what she really was, and now Carol and Bee were coming to know too, and they wouldn't like her. And the summer stretched ahead, dreary and dreadful. For it took more courage than Ruth possessed to try to bluff, to-day, a new shining self.

It also took more insight than Ruth possessed for her to realize that any such change as she desired must take place deep within herself, in her spirit, first. One cannot pretend to

be what one is not. That is the surest way to failure. Ruth had failed but she didn't yet know why. She was to endure much before she learned.

So it was the same quiet stiff Ruth who appeared at breakfast that morning. A girl whose manner was so repressed and cold as to forbid the warm advance Jeanne had resolved to make. It was an utter impossibility to slip an arm through Ruth's and talk with her naturally. Jeanne, chilled at the start of the day, had reached the lowest point of discouragement when she, with Ruth and Mother Stafford, stood waiting for the train that afternoon that was to bring M'amselle and her two charges, Carol and Bee. For the success of her house party largely rested with her. It was for her to promote good fellowship, establish warm friendship and guarantee to her guests a good time. But if her guests themselves refused friendship, and spoiled their own good time, what was she to do?

Her anxiety had become almost tearful when the train stopped and the few passengers alighted. To Jeanne it was positively almost a relief when a distracted M'amselle in sobs

and broken English caught Mrs. Stafford's hands in hers and cried out:

"Oh! Madame! The sickness that I feel. Those two babes are lost. I know not where. For just a moment for a leetle breath of air we stopped off the train. Those naughties—against my express wish, Madame,—would go in to buy candy. I called to them, and ran to get on. The train was moving. I supposed they had entered by another door. I went to search—the whole train was searched, but ——"

Her excited outburst finally ended in tears. Jeanne, who was the only one to comprehend entirely, put an arm about the weary black garbed little woman and spoke to her in French. It comforted her as nothing else could have. She dried her tears, kissed Jeanne on both cheeks and strove to answer Mrs. Stafford's question calmly.

"Did they have any money?"

"A little—how much I know not. Carol carries her own purse with some in it always—but the tickets and the most of everything was with me. I think she had enough for the candy."

Mrs. Stafford went at once to the telegraph office. When she came back she was pale but quiet. M'amselle had gladly shifted the responsibility on to the American lady's shoulders and the little group listened in silence.

The girls had been left in Rutland. The station agent had seen them. They had asked about trains to Sunnapine. He had told them there was no other train except a freight until the evening. They had walked away and had not been seen since. Mrs. Stafford concluded that they had more money than M'amselle realized and had gone into town to find something to eat, or else just to pass the hours until the evening train.

"Are they girls whom you think would be sensible and level-headed in an emergency like this? Could they take care of themselves, do you think?" Mrs. Stafford asked M'amselle.

She shrugged.

"Zey are vairy remarkable girls, the both of them. I could never say what zey could do or what zey could not. For I believe American girls can do anything they wish."

This made them laugh and a little of the tension was relieved. Mrs. Stafford finally con-

cluded there was nothing to do but go back to the cottage and come down for the evening train three hours later. Of course they could motor to Rutland but it would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack to find them there.

With compressed lips and thoughtful brow Mrs. Stafford finally decided they would better go back to the cottage. She would not sound an alarm until she had given the girls a chance to take care of themselves.

So back they went, a rather quiet, apprehensive group. M'amselle was given one of the down-stairs bedrooms opening off the living-room and after she had refreshed herself by a change of clothes and a wash, she joined the other three on the porch.

They heard the freight rumbling in and out again, and then a silence that grew more and more anxious and apprehensive rested upon the watchers.

"Oh," Jeanne cried at last, "I simply can't stand this sitting and worrying. It's terrible. Come on, Ruth, let's go down to the road and walk a little."

They had hardly gotten off the porch and into the dusty roadway below, when they saw,

turning in at the horseshoe, a plodding horse pulling an old wagon, and two surprising young figures sitting on the driver's seat.

It was rather amusing that none of them could voice the question or the hope that was in their hearts, but as though jerked by a single string, all four of them gathered together on the lowest step of the porch and stood stock still, after Jeanne's low cry, waiting for the wagon to approach.

It was a laborer's dirt cart, an old dump cart that bumped and rattled and jolted the two girls about as though they had been dummies. Bee held the reins. Her hat was off, her cheeks were flushed, her short bobbed hair clinging in damp curls about her forehead, and she waved her whip and halloed a welcome to the astonished group.

"It's all right! It's us! We're here!"

Beside her, more crumpled and rumped and dirty than M'amselle had ever beheld her, was Carol. With slim white hands she clung to her precarious seat. Her face was pale but she was smiling gamely, rather tremendously excited at her first unchaperoned adventure.

As they drew up before the cottage, Bee jumped down and rushed to Mrs. Stafford.

“Of course you’re Aunt Bee! Oh! we’re so sorry, M’amselle; do please excuse us for frightening you to death! It was all my fault—Jeanne! You darling. May I kiss you? You’re *exactly* the way Jack said you’d be. How do you do, Ruth?”

There came suddenly a frightened squawk from Carol.

“Bee! Help me down! He’s running away!”

Bee jumped to the ancient horse who had ambled forward to take a few bites of grass. M’amselle tried to help Carol alight, but was brushed aside.

“How do you do, Aunt Bee? I’m really too dirty to touch you. I never was so dirty ——” A little ruefully she gazed at her soiled dress and hands. “But it has been fun. Were you frightened, M’amselle? How silly! We aren’t babies.” Her tone to the fluttering French woman was contemptuous. “Now don’t fuss. It was all too simple. We simply begged a ride on the freight train. It was frightfully jolty. I expect I’m a mass of bruises. And

at the station there was no taxicab. Then I was floored but Bee poked around asking a lot of terrible looking men at the post-office questions and finally arranged to drive this chariot up herself."

"The man's coming up later for his household pet." Bee laughed. "Carol was terrified of this lamb." She patted the horse's neck. "I wish you could see Whiz. She's a horse!"

"And now, please, may I wash?" asked Carol. "Have you unpacked our bags, M'amselle? No? Well, what have you been doing? I wish clean clothes at once. Where is my room, Jeanne?"

She slipped an arm through Jeanne's and led her into the house, ignoring Ruth. Mrs. Stafford and Bee followed. M'amselle and Ruth remained on the porch.

"M'amselle has no sense at all," Carol confided in an undertone. "You are prettier than I thought you'd be. Ruth isn't pretty at all, is she?"

Mrs. Stafford spoke.

"The bathroom is on the first floor, Carol, off the kitchen. It is our latest improvement.

We are very proud of it. Ask Katie if there's enough hot water for a bath."

"No, ma'am," came Katie's voice from the kitchen, and Katie followed her voice to the living-room. "There's narry a drop of hot. 'Twas too warm a day for me to be startin' the coal fire in the shtove. Can't the young lady take her bath in the lake like Miss Ruth did?"

Carol stood staring in amazement at this easy spoken servant who, unrebuked, gave her this suggestion. With a stamp of her foot and a toss of her head she was about to speak when Aunt Bee got ahead of her.

"Of course, I thought probably you hadn't had a fire but it was as well to make sure. Get your bathing suit, Carol, you and Bee, and fly down to the boat house for your bath."

With difficulty Carol choked back various unsaid things and managed to reply, simply:

"Find my bathing suit, M'amselle."

"Carol."

Something in Mrs. Stafford's voice brought the young girl to a halt at the foot of the stairs. She turned in surprise to face her aunt.

"Your mother has written me that M'am-

selle has been paid to bring you to my house. After that her service for you ends. You are here. M'amselle is dismissed and is my guest for a few days until she is ready to leave. You will have to unpack your own clothes. Your suitcase is in your room."

Amazement, incredulity, anger swept over Carol's young face. Never had so authoritative and kind a voice spoken to her. The experience left her dumb. Finally she tossed her head and with an "Oh! very well," ran lightly up the stairs.

Jeanne followed, then Bee. On the way up at the bend of the stairs, Bee caught Jeanne's arm and whispered:

"Can't we room together?"

Jeanne nodded.

"Which is my room?" Carol demanded at the doorway of Jeanne's room.

"You and Ruth have this one, next to Bee's and mine," Jeanne said quietly. "Mother's is here."

This time anger flashed into Carol's face, burning out the tears that had first sprung to her eyes.

"I'm not accustomed to sharing my room,"

she said in a low tense voice, "not with persons like—her." And she nodded below.

Jeanne was suddenly as coolly angry as Carol was hot.

"There seem to be many things you are not accustomed to. Life is like that. One must simply take them as they come—these disagreeable experiences—and laugh!"

"Preaching!" Carol's tone was contemptuous. She flung into her bedroom and slammed the door.

Bee and Jeanne entered theirs and Bee closed the door carefully, then she turned to look at Jeanne.

She stood in the middle of the room, her hands clenched, her eyes blazing. Bee went to her, kissed her quickly, patted her shoulder and then started unpacking the suitcase that lay on one of the gray chairs. Between these two had sprung up instantly an understanding that needed no words nor long period of time to strengthen. It was evident in Jeanne's whispered words to Bee as she turned and seated herself in the other chair.

"Thank goodness for you, Beatrice Kent," she said solemnly.

"And thank goodness for you," Bee whispered back as solemnly. Then they both quickly smothered a laugh and began to talk about Bee's journey, her home in the West, the people here at the lake and—Dr. Jack.

Jeanne listened eagerly to all the news. He was close to the front line of battle now and terribly busy, but oh! so thankful to be, and wishing they were dozens of him. Then Bee handed over some snapshots he had sent home of himself. Jeanne bent her head and scanned them closely.

"Ah!" she cried at last, with satisfaction. "Here is a laughing one. That is how I knew him. A laughing Dr. Jack. Not one but he laughed at camp, you know. Might I keep this?"

Bee nodded and while she talked, Jeanne cut out the little picture and fitted it into the cover of her wrist watch.

"This was the only kind of a suit I could get. Is it all right?"

Jeanne looked at Bee's slim little figure in the green suit with its diminutive skirt, and nodded.

“Perfectly. Just like Ruth’s. She’s a wonderful swimmer. Are you?”

“Can’t swim a stroke. But I’m going to learn. Carol can. Ready, Carol?” she called.

“Yes.” Curt, hard, the answer came and the three met in the hall.

“You can come back here and dress or take your clothes to the boat house,” Jeanne told them both.

“Oh, I’ll come back here. Saves lugging down my things.”

“I’ll dress there,” Carol said quickly. “I’ll at least be sure of privacy.”

Ruth went with them to the boat house, miserably wishing she had not, until Jeanne slipped an arm through hers on the balcony and said quietly:

“You must teach us, Bee and myself. Will you?”

“I’d love to.”

There was a little silence as they watched the two in the water below, Bee splashing about tremendously, unafraid with Jeanne’s water-wings, Carol slipping through the water swift as a fish, now floating lazily on her back, now

darting under the water to come up suddenly and grab at Bee's legs.

With all the girls generous in their praise of Carol's skill in the water, a semblance of friendliness was established. The atmosphere of the place was to depend, after all, on Carol, not Ruth. For Ruth, stiff and tactless as she was, did not quarrel. She kept still. She kept too still. Carol was going to speak too much and too quickly. She would be the wrangler, the one who would make sparks fly. If Carol's mood was peaceful peace would reign. If she was irritable, she was the sort of person who would eventually succeed in making everyone else irritable.

She was the last to leave the water and Ruth, following Bee and Jeanne up while Bee dressed, wandered rather aimlessly into her own bedroom while she waited. At the threshold she stood still in a shock of horror.

For the room which she had remembered leaving in perfect orderliness was now in a mess. Carol must have whirled her clothes out of her suitcase, for they lay all over. On the beds, on the chairs, on the floor. The closet door was open. The bureau was a confusion

of hair-nets, powder boxes spilling their fragrant contents, and hairpins. Ruth gave a little laugh, and at the same time she felt a hot wave of fury sweep over her. This was *her* room as much as it was Carol's. What right had she? And they had to share the bureau. Was it always to be in dirty array?

She was on the point of sweeping Carol's clothes from her own bed to the floor, but as she touched them, anger died and in its place came a feeling so odd that she did not know quite what it was. Envy, of course, that the soft silks and satins were not her own. But it was something more than that. It was an awe, a reverence for the sheer beauty of them, their texture, their daintiness. She caught her breath, held them close, felt them lingeringly, then, before she was aware of it, she was picking up everything with an unspeakable delight in the mere touch of the stuff, hanging silken skirts and petticoats and waists in the closet, folding away the crêpe de chine underwear, putting the dainty little shoes in a neat row on the floor.

And as she worked some vague thoughts came to her. Not clearly, for Ruth did not as

yet think clearly, but there was a wonder if Carol would resent her action, a faint belief that she would not, that without M'amselle's service for her, she would be glad of Ruth. Not that Ruth would do the servant trick too often but,—and this with some complacency,—it might teach Carol a lesson, evidently needed, that every lady knows how to take care of her own things. But back of it all was the urgent hunger for friendliness. Ruth felt terribly alone, more so as she saw Jeanne's and Bee's instant companionship. Carol would intrude on those two as she, Ruth, would. Might they not, then, she and Carol, form an attachment of their own?

She had disliked Carol at once, had resented Carol's rude ignoring of her,—but she was so pretty. Oh! She was so pretty! Jeanne was, of course, but not in quite this dashing assured way of Carol's. Ruth, having neither beauty nor self-possession, admired it in others. And perhaps—just perhaps—Carol could, in some unseen and inexplicable way, help her to be that shining butterfly self she so longed to be.

So Ruth put the room in order again and

then with that tremulousness carefully hidden under a stoic exterior, she went down to the supper table spread again on the porch. They were all there waiting for Carol who came in and ran up-stairs to fix her hair. When she came down later in a pale blue dress with her golden hair caught back in a big black bow and her slim feet in black slippers, she was a lovely picture.

“Who picked up all my clothes?” she demanded.

A dull color suffused Ruth’s face, but she spoke up bravely.

“I did, Carol. I hope you don’t mind. They were so lovely, all those silky things, I couldn’t keep my hands off them.”

“Why! I think it was sweet of you.”

Carol gave Ruth a brilliant smile and went over and sat down next to her. She could have, when it suited her, a charming and irresistible way. Everyone felt the change in her and at once the tension in the atmosphere relaxed. M’amselle’s anxious face smoothed into an expression of content; Bee squeezed Jeanne’s hand under the table, murmured a low “Hurray” and passed the bread. Ruth

returned Carol's smile slightly, then heaved an unheard sigh of thankfulness and hid the glow in herself by dropping her eyes.

The supper ended just as darkness came. M'amselle and Mrs. Stafford sat on in their chairs; Bee and Jeanne, Ruth and Carol squeezed into a swing and started pushing it as they hummed some popular songs.

Gradually they fell silent, until the only sounds to be heard were the soft banging of moths against the screens; the gay trill of a mandolin in a cottage around the curve; sweet singing from the lake where a faint twilight still lingered; and the rhythmic plop of oars in the water.

"Look," Jeanne whispered.

A great orange moon was swiftly riding up over dark hills, paling to silver as it mounted, touching the mysterious dark world with a lovely radiance.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Jeanne said in an awe-struck voice.

"Heavenly." Bee was reverent, emotion so large, mixed of homesickness and joy and appreciation, shaking her that she was nearer to tears than she realized.

“I’m simply thrilled,” Carol said, “simply thrilled. It all seems so adventuresome—this summer, and us here together ——”

Ruth said nothing, but Jeanne, catching a glimpse of her gray eyes, saw that behind the tears, so surprisingly discovered in them, was a shine of happiness.

CHAPTER III

BREAKERS AHEAD

CAROL had entered her room with a frown remembering that M'amselle was no longer at her service and that she would have to take care of her own possessions. But as she looked around she gasped with surprise, then a quick flush rose to her face. Her first reaction to Ruth's generosity was resentment. How dared she touch her things? But in a later cooler moment Carol realized that Ruth as a roommate might prove much more useful than sweet Jeanne whose quiet brown gaze seemed at times to look right through her, or than the blunt and outspoken Bee, who could say what she thought without losing her temper. Yes. Ruth would be the easiest to live with.

So Carol had come down to thank Ruth in her most charming mood, and the older girl's honest pleasure that she had taken it that way Carol was quick to see. There followed quite

naturally the development of a rather odd friendship. Ruth reveled in Carol's personal beauty and the loveliness of her clothes. She was frank and generous in her pleasure, more outspoken to Carol in their room than at any other time, and Carol accepted this homage, rather loftily, it is true, but with occasional genuine descents to appreciation whenever Ruth showed an inclination to resent Carol's superior manner.

As the days went by it became more and more a matter of habit for Ruth to keep their room in order and mend for Carol. This had come about gradually. In the beginning Carol really made half-hearted attempts to do her share but her clumsiness and carelessness distressed Ruth so that she invariably shyly proffered help. Carol was quick to seize upon it, to speak the warm appreciation she felt and to resolve secretly that she would some day do something nice for Ruth.

But if Carol side-stepped her share of responsibility in their own quarters it was impossible to shift her burden in other places. For Mrs. Stafford, with only Katie to help her, had decided that the girls should do some part

of the household work. Katie, of course, did all the cooking, and waited on the table. The laundry was sent out of the house to a woman in the village. James drove the car and took care of the boats. Mrs. Stafford expected the girls not only to care for their own rooms but to help with the dishes and the cleaning downstairs and a little bit with the running of the house.

This was a disappointment to Ruth. She had not known how many servants Aunt Bee kept, but she had looked forward to an entire release from housework. However, after the first disappointment she found she was glad. Too much time to brood over her misfit with the young people would have made her desperately unhappy. When her hands were occupied her mind was too, and besides what she did was so little compared to what she was accustomed to doing at home, that it was still a real vacation for her.

Bee, of course, accepted the arrangement as set forth by Aunt Bee in a matter-of-fact little manner that asked no questions and made no complaint, but Carol was peevish about it. After Mrs. Stafford had explained the ar-

rangement the first morning she quietly told Carol that she was expected to dry the dishes for Katie that day.

The quick color flew to Carol's cheeks. She was utterly unused to an authoritative voice. Her own mother had been fretful with her but never firm, and the governesses engaged by Mrs. King had of course been treated as employees. Carol had therefore grown up quite unrestrained, although she had always been carefully fenced about by conventions, carefully watched over by countless highly paid women.

"Why don't you get M'amselle to stay and do this sort of thing?" she asked. Her tone was audacious, and disdainful. Mrs. Stafford's look rested on Carol until the girl's eyes dropped, then the reply came.

"M'amselle has plans of her own. She leaves us to-morrow. I think the few duties I require of you may be beneficial."

So Carol silently dried dishes beside an equally silent Katie who was as wise as her years made her. And the following day Carol dusted the down-stairs rooms and picked fresh flowers. And the third day she bought, under

Mrs. Stafford's direction, from the vegetable men and butcher who came to peddle their wares at the back door. She handled the money and took care of the food until Katie had time to prepare it for eating. The fourth day Carol found herself cleaning the bathroom and planning the following day's meals. After that, of course, she began drying dishes again.

"I think it's the limit," she confided to Ruth, "that Aunt Bee with all her money shouldn't have servants to do the work for her."

Ruth was silent. Arguing with Carol was always futile, for Carol quickly lost her temper. So Ruth, standing in her petticoat before the glass, absorbed in the business of arranging her hair, listened idly as Carol fussed. Too absorbed even to realize that Carol had stopped her talking and was watching Ruth's efforts with a frown on her face.

"Oh, Ruth," she cried at last, bringing her hands together sharply, "don't puff it out over your ears so *much*."

Ruth paused in her work, her arm in the air, then the dark, unbecoming color rushed to her face and she turned to face Carol, her voice quivering.

“You—you—when it’s so *easy* for you to look pretty—with your hair and your face and your clothes—and I try so hard—Oh!”

She ended in a gulp. Her hair fell in a mass about her shoulders and Carol stared in embarrassment and terror at the stricken face before her. Ruth shouldn’t. Oh! she shouldn’t lay bare her shame so. It was indecent.

Carol’s actions were as impulsive as her words had been. She pushed a chair behind Ruth, forced her into it, caught the brush and began twisting and pinning the heavy hair.

When she was through she thrust a hand glass into Ruth’s hands.

“There! Now!” she cried triumphantly. “That’s all I wanted! And you couldn’t seem to get it. Don’t you like it?”

Ruth confessed that she did. The huge masses she had so struggled to keep on either side of her face were done away with. Her hair puffed, yes, but just enough to hint that it was the style. Then it was coiled into a firm heavy knot at the back of her neck. It made her square face look slimmer, her short neck look longer, and Carol clapped her hands and called Bee and Jeanne in to approve.

That was the beginning of Carol's payment of her debt to Ruth. She experienced such a glow of warm feeling for her act that she proceeded to attempt a little more. She was awkward and rude enough sometimes in her suggestions, for Carol was not bred to recognizing sensitiveness in anyone but herself, but Ruth appreciated the honesty of Carol's desire to help her make the best of herself and never took offense.

"Your style is plain," Carol squinted in a professional way down her nose at Ruth. "What I mean is, that simple things are going to be more becoming to you than fluffy ruffy things. You must take off all floppy laces and things and just trim with narrow edgings. Your belts and sashes must be narrow and worn low and you must wear sport clothes as much as possible. You look simply ducky in them—pleated skirts, low-heeled shoes, simple shirt-waists, sweaters——" she waved her hands. "You know."

Ruth groaned.

"If I'd known before I came, my new clothes would have been different."

"Fix them over. You're smart enough."

So Ruth did. Carol, not liking some wool she had bought for herself, had flung it in a heap across the room.

"It doesn't matter," she said angrily. "It's too blue a green."

"Dye it," Ruth suggested.

"Oh mercy, no. I don't know how and it's not worth the trouble. I'll buy more."

"Aren't you going to use this?"

"No. Can you?"

"Maybe."

And after Carol's suggestion about wearing sweaters and skirts, Ruth got out the bottle-green worsted, dyed it black and knitted herself a sweater that was most becoming to her. She bought herself a pair of white and black sport shoes, which she wore with either black or white stockings. Her hat, fortunately, was black, and though it was a stiff sailor instead of crushed felt, it went with her outfit very nicely. She ripped the waists off two of her dresses, the yellow and green, and pleated the skirts on to a belting. Then, with clean starched collars and cuffs in the neck and sleeves of her black sweater and a narrow white leather belt around it, she looked and felt much better dressed.

All this took time, and Ruth, sewing in her room, often missed informal gatherings on the wide verandah down-stairs. She did not care. No one paid any attention to her when she was there, so she might better stay away. Sometimes she wondered just why she was fussing over her clothes when it was much too late to make a new impression on the people here, but there lurked in the still depths of Ruth's consciousness a feeling that the summer was young and "something" was bound to happen before she went home. Sometime she'd be glad she had remodeled her wardrobe, she was sure. So she worked on, with hope in her heart.

"Oh, come on down, Ruth, leave your sewing. We're all going in swimming." This from Carol about ten days after their arrival.

"I just want to finish this skirt." Ruth, her mouth full of pins, mumbled.

"But do it afterward."

Ruth shook her head, murmuring something about swimming afterward at the boat house if she got through in time. So Carol danced out, stopping on her way at Jeanne's door.

Jeanne was reading a letter. Carol, entering, noticed the envelope in her lap. It bore

the usual Y. M. C. A. letter-head and Carol knew it was from Jack. On the bed beside her lay another letter,—“S. S. Galveston” stamped on it in the corner. From Tom Kelly, probably.

Carol had, of course, heard all about the heroes in Jeanne's life. Jack Kent, Bee's brother, who had rescued her from starvation in a cellar and persuaded Aunt Bee to adopt her, and Tom Kelly the sailor lad who had defied the laws of the sea and helped her smuggle aboard ship on her way to America. They were both much in the conversation and thoughts of all the girls, but particularly in Carol's. It was astounding to her now that Jeanne should have received two letters from two men in uniform in the same day without even changing color. At the breakfast table, where they lay on Jeanne's plate when she came down, Carol had started to tease but Jeanne had looked so surprised that her words fell flat. Discovering Jeanne reading them again this afternoon opened the way for more teasing comments but instead Carol cried:

“Weren't you thrilled to hear from two men at once? And both of them in service? Why,

I don't know anybody in a uniform. I wish I did. Weren't you *thrilled*?"

"I was glad," Jeanne answered frankly. "I worry about Dr. Jack all the time. He is in the fighting area. Of course, Tom is in danger, too. He just wrote to thank me for my steamer letter."

"Haven't you got pictures of them? I'd love to see them."

"Oh, yes, I have a darling one of Dr. Jack I wear in my watch. Bee gave it to me. But I have none of Tom."

"In your watch—always with you," Carol said with meaningful glance. "You must be crazy about him."

Jeanne, in the act of opening her watch, looked up at Carol.

"You say such funny things. Crazy? No. It is just this. Without Dr. Jack I should not be here. He found Mother Stafford for me. Naturally, I love him."

It was so simply said that Carol grew confused. She stared at the laughing face in her hand a moment, then gave it back.

"He looks like a peach. I'm sure I think you lucky, you with two men. Well, you can't

have them all. I'm going to get Ted away from you, anyhow."

Jeanne's eyes widened in surprise.

"Oh, don't look so innocent, Miss Frenchy. You know he is gone about you. Absolutely nuts."

They were interrupted by shouts from Bee. The crowd was gathering at the beach, she said, so they hurried down to join her. At the shore they found Ted and Victor and all the Allens. Bee and Jeanne set to work at once struggling to swim in shallow water, while Carol, a butterfly in her pale blue suit, laughed and chattered on the dock with the boys for a long time before she would go in. Finally all were in except herself and Ted. She smiled at him.

"Let's swim out."

"Sure."

There were two streaks through the air, two splashes, then Ted's gleaming head and Carol's blue cap rose to the surface and they started out away from the screaming crowd near shore.

Carol turned on her side and smiled at Ted.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello, yourself."

"You're a wonderful swimmer."

"Same to you."

"Oh! but not nearly so good as Ruth."

"Uh-huh, every bit. Anyway, I like your suit better."

Carol's light laugh rang back to shore. Mrs. Stafford, hearing it, looked up and called:

"Come back, Carol, come back."

Ted obediently turned.

"What's your hurry?"

"Your aunt called."

"Maybe I didn't hear her."

Ted stared in surprise. Then—

"Oh, all right."

They went out a little farther.

"Carol! Come ba-a-ck!"

Mrs. Stafford, calling again from the shore, frowned ever so slightly. Carol, she realized, was going to be difficult to manage and a little sigh escaped her as she realized that there would be a good many breakers ahead before there would be smooth sailing for all members of Jeanne's house party.

Carol turned leisurely.

"Ever go swimming by moonlight?" she asked.

"No, did you?"

“No, but I’d love to. Wouldn’t you?”

“You bet.”

“It must be exciting. Couldn’t we do it?”

“Sure—get the crowd.”

“We-ll, it wouldn’t be safe for Bee and Jeanne to try it. They might get over their heads in the dark. But you and Vic and Ruth and I could. Don’t you think it would be fun?”

“Sure.”

“When? To-night?”

“Will your aunt mind?”

“We can keep it a secret. She needn’t know everything and I’ve shown her to-day how I can swim.”

“Some pep to you,” Ted commented, his blue eyes regarding her curiously.

Carol laughed gaily.

“Listen,” she said in a low voice, “the moon comes up at seven. We go to bed at ten. Aunt Bee’s chauffeur will be away; and she will be at the card party. At eleven it should be exactly right—bright as day. Ruth and I will slip down to the boat house and meet you there. Are you game?”

“Sure.”

“ I don't see any harm in it, do you? ”

Ted shook his head.

That was the question Carol put to Ruth when her manner expressed an uneasiness. She had not had time to go swimming and when she told Carol so, Carol made known her plan for the evening. Ruth hesitated. She would love to oblige Carol and it did sound exciting, but somehow it couldn't be *right* ——

“ But why not? ”

Ruth puzzled:

“ Maybe it's the secret of the thing; why not tell Aunt Bee, Carol? I'm sure she'd let us.”

“ Oh, then the fun would go. You old poke.” Carol grew cross. “ Don't you see? It's the mystery of it, the secret of it, that makes it spicy. Go and tell and it's no different from a daylight affair. Everybody'd be there to watch.”

Ruth would decide later, she said, but it was not until Carol stood in her clothes at the door of her room, shoes in hand, that night at eleven that she made up her mind.

“ Coming? ”

Ruth hesitated and was lost.

“ Yes, I'm coming; wait.”

They stole on tiptoe, breathless and clutching each other, to the foot of the stairs. The living-room was lighted. As Carol darted across it followed by Ruth, a voice from a chair in the shadows startled them.

“Where are you going, girls?”

Carol gave a soft shriek and dropped her shoes.

“Oh, oh! Why, Aunt Bee!” she cried, confused. “I thought you were at the Bridge.”

“I had such a headache I came home.” Mrs. Stafford stood before them with grave eyes. “Where are you going?”

“We—we were just going for a moonlight swim, Aunt Bee. It was so lovely out, and so hot up-stairs, we couldn’t sleep—and we just thought how refreshing——”

Carol paused before her aunt’s steady look.

“Why, that may be a very good idea,” Mrs. Stafford said at last slowly. “I don’t know why I hadn’t thought to plan a moonlight swim for you girls. Of course you would love it. Why didn’t you ask me, dear, if you wanted it?”

Carol colored and said nothing.

"I'll just get my sweater and you can go right ahead as you planned. Were you going to the boat house?"

"Yes."

Not another word was said as they went from the house to the boat house, and when the boys in their bathing suits leaped out from the shadows to meet them and then backed suddenly at the sight of Aunt Bee, the girls let her do the talking.

"Good-evening, Vic. Good-evening, Ted."

That kind grave voice! If only she had scolded, Carol could have been in a fury, but she knew no way to combat this.

"Stay in as long as you like; I'm in no hurry." And Aunt Bee sank into a chair on the balcony and put her head back. No one saw the smile in her eyes except the man in the moon, and he smiled back.

CHAPTER IV

AN EXCITING PICNIC

THE next day Mrs. Stafford found time to have a quiet talk with Jeanne. She and Bee had waked the night before and had heard enough of the conversation to guess what was going on, but had wisely stayed in bed. So when Mrs. Stafford suggested that a definite program of events be planned for the next few weeks, Jeanne met it with perfect understanding.

Mrs. Stafford explained that Carol was simply feeling her freedom. It was the first time she had been away without her mother and without a paid attendant shadowing her. The realization of it unbalanced her. Aunt Bee she regarded as a perfectly proper chaperone, but a person who was not "on her trail," as she put it. It would be easy, she thought, to "put things over," have a "boarding-school sort of good time." But she had reckoned without

knowing Aunt Bee. Quiet and unobtrusive she was, but exceptionally observant and wise. After this last check that had been put on her, Mrs. Stafford knew Carol would sulk, would nurse her resentment, and unless she were distracted from brooding over it by a whirl of good times it might spoil the summer for her and for them all.

Jeanne was relieved to have her mother talk with her so frankly. There had been a tacit agreement that Jeanne should form her own opinions, should meet personal differences and difficulties as well as she could and manage her own house party. So she had said very little of her own impressions about the girls. But this advance opened the way and Jeanne, her head on her mother's knee as they talked down on the boat house balcony, spoke out of a full heart.

She told Mrs. Stafford, with distress in her eyes and voice, that Ruth was having a miserable time. She was fixing her hair better, she was on a self-imposed diet, doing without sweets until her face should clear up, she had worked so hard over her clothes and she *was* much better looking, still the boys didn't like

her. At the last dance she had been a wall-flower and had come home early pleading a headache.

On the other hand Carol—well—Carol—Jeanne hesitated here. It seemed so horribly like tattling, but it finally had to come, because Jeanne wanted counsel. Yes, the boys liked Carol. They flocked about her three deep. It was partly because she was so pretty, partly her gay assured manner, but partly also because she was familiar with the boys—even smoked a bit now and then—and was, Jeanne thought, persuading Ruth to smoke too.

“What shall I do?” Jeanne clasped her white hands in her lap. “What shall I *do*? Ted has talked to me. Already he doesn’t like her as well as he did at first. She’s hurting herself. Don’t you see? And if I say a word she tells me I’m preaching.”

Mrs. Stafford was thoughtful. Carol was, indeed, dizzy with the sense of freedom. She was running wild. Yet Jeanne was right. A word from her would do no good. If she, Mrs. Stafford, spoke, a bad matter would be made worse. Carol must learn either through some hurting experience or—could Ted talk to her?

But Mrs. Stafford dismissed this thought. He was too young. She patted Jeanne's hand, smiling into the concerned face below her.

"Don't worry, dear. You can't help the way people are made."

"But you can sometimes help the way they are making themselves," Jeanne said soberly. "But oh! it isn't that! I don't want to be a reformer. I hate it. It's just that my house party is disappointing. Half of us aren't having a good time!"

"Well, that's just what we're here for, you and I, to help them have a good time. And one of the best ways of doing it—for Carol at least—is to pack the days full of excitement. Why not go for a moonlight boat ride to-night? Or—better yet—a supper first, at the island, then ride home by moonlight."

Jeanne agreed at once and at her mother's suggestion she ran down to the tennis court at the "Green" to see if Mr. Allen would take them in his big launch.

She found Ted and Carol playing against Ruth and Victor. Ruth played a fairly good game for a girl, with much earnestness, but Carol, a beginner, made the game a social

event. She laughed at all her blunders, regardless of the fact that her indifferent playing was spoiling the game for the others.

"Come on, Carol, will you?" Ted called. "You're in the wrong court. Stop talking and let's finish this."

"Don't be so cross, Ted," Carol flashed back. "Who's playing this game, anyway?"

"Everybody but you," the boy answered coolly. Carol, in a burst of anger, the first the young people had seen her in, flung her racquet on the grass and following it, she dropped in the shade.

"Come on, Bee, finish this game instead of Carol, will you?" Ted called unabashed.

"Don't you want to, Carol?" Bee asked.

"I do *not*. I'll have nothing to do with anyone so rude as some people I know."

Bee laughed and took the racquet from the ground. She and Ruth were fairly evenly matched, and the score, so heavily against Ted before, mounted slowly in their favor until it was a deuce set. Finally with a flourish, Ted and Bee won.

All four walked breathless and hot to the

spring to get a cold drink, then they gathered by Jeanne and Carol and the Allens who were talking and laughing excitedly.

“What’s up? Picnic?” Ted asked.

“Just that.” Jeanne turned to him eagerly. “We thought we’d take a picnic supper and go up the lake to the island. Eat it there, and come home by moonlight. The moon will be up between ten and eleven to-night.”

“Bully.”

That was one of Ted’s nicest characteristics—his instant enthusiasm for anything that might come up. It was the thing that made him so popular.

“Whose launch?” Vic inquired in his surly way.

“Allens’. You said you thought we might, didn’t you, Dorothy?”

“I’m sure it’ll be all right,” Dorothy said. “Dad will take us—he can be chaperon.”

“Let’s go right after our swim,” Jeanne cried, “and we must hurry for that; it’s getting late.”

So about six o’clock that afternoon the eight of them gathered on the dock of the Allens’ boat house with their boxes and baskets.

"Where is Dad?" Dorothy cried impatiently. "He's always late."

"Coming—right here," her father's deep voice said behind her. "Be careful how you malign people, my dear."

He was a short stout man with the jolly face and twinkling eyes that usually accompany fatness. Just now he looked at the boys and girls a little soberly.

"Well, I'm sorry to tell you——" he paused.

"Oh, what?"

"Mother hasn't said we can't?"

"The boat isn't out of order?"

Mr. Allen kept them in suspense a dreadful moment. Then the twinkle appeared and before he could say what it was he was sorry about, he was good-naturedly pushed into the boat by his nephews.

"No, but really," he protested, "I am sorry to tell you that it isn't going to be a very nice night. The sky has clouded over and I don't think there'll be a moon. Wouldn't you rather wait?"

"With everything already fixed?"

"Mr. Allen!"

“Dad, quit your teasing.”

“The less moon, the better some people will be pleased.”

“I see I’m in the minority.” Mr. Allen finally yielded and set to the business of starting the engine while the boys packed away the boxes of food and helped the girls in.

Mr. Allen had a little difficulty and when they finally started the sun had set and the exquisite afterglow was stealing up over the sky, tinting the heavy scudding gray clouds in magnificent unbelievable colors.

As the boat receded from shore and the cottages of the horseshoe settlement were lost in the distance, the dark pines rose a solid black mass against a vivid background. It was a picture for an artist, and Bee and Jeanne were the only appreciative spectators. To the Western girl there was a grandeur in the scene that was familiar to her in the vast spaces of her home country. It caught her by the throat, for a second, giving her a little twinge of homesickness. She discovered Jeanne looking at her and nodded.

“It’s—it’s the first time the East has been splendid. It’s been quaint and pretty here.

But this is so striking—the black and the red of it—it reminds me of home.”

Jeanne smiled.

“It makes me ache too,” she said in a low voice.

“Oh, you’d love it in Montana,” Bee said suddenly. “I wish you could visit me there.”

“I expect to some day,” Jeanne answered laughing. “I expect”—she spread her hands—“I expect everything—anything to happen to me. So much has,” she ended.

“Things will too,” Ruth chimed in rather unexpectedly. “You’re that sort of a person. I’m not. I’ll go back from here and settle down into the routine of High School and home work and wonder if I didn’t dream this summer.”

The three girls had chosen to sit forward on the deck where they might get every bit of breeze and spray that came their way.

“Are you happy, here with us, Ruth?” Jeanne asked suddenly. “Will it be a dear dream when you look back to it?”

The slow dark flush spread to Ruth’s forehead while she tried to answer. Finally, just

as she began to stammer out something about its being "too early to tell," Ted scrambled up among them, and further intimacies were impossible.

They sped up the lake for about six miles to the tiny circular island which rose up in about the center. It was a popular picnic place, and there were several ready prepared fireplaces. The girls had brought bacon, of course, and corn to cook over the blaze, and the boys immediately went hunting for firewood while the girls began supper preparations.

"We'll have to be careful about sparks," Mr. Allen said. "There's a heavy breeze sweeping down the lake and it looks to me as though it were going to get heavier."

"Dad, dear," Grace reproved, "you begin to sound like Mother. Don't. We're here. Let's not worry. Let's just all have a good time."

Which they did, each in his and her own way. Carol, it was noticed, took no interest in the supper preparations. The whole affair looked dirty to her. Cooking bacon over a fire, when it either burned or dropped off in the

ashes, held no tantalizing pleasure for her. She very conspicuously absented herself during the business of cutting bread and slicing bacon and stripping corn, and went off to hunt for sticks with Ted. When they came back the others were eating and Ted, amidst the jeers of his companions, held up two sticks he had gathered. Carol was smiling and shrugging her indifference.

Bee and Jeanne, on the other hand, manœuvered the outdoor meal most efficiently. Ruth was an interested observer, for though she was accustomed to cooking, she was not used to cooking over an open fire and she learned a good deal as she sat watching and listening, ready to offer a helping hand at crucial moments.

Bee was in her element. Jeanne and she, one out of a lifetime of experiences in camping tricks, and the other out of a brief and difficult week in devastated France where an existence was wrested from nothing with almost nothing, got the meal in progress and then turned to find comfortable places for themselves.

It was then that Ted and Carol appeared

and Ted, to turn their attention from himself, said:

“Don't let your fire get too high. The sparks are flying way over to the other side of the island, and the trees are dry timber.”

“Is this state property?” Bee asked of Mr. Allen. She knew something of forest fires and her face was serious.

“No, it belongs to us. We always thought we'd build here some day, instead of renting,” Mr. Allen replied. “But we haven't found a spring yet. Boys!” he shouted to his nephews above the rush of wind that was now sweeping through the tree tops. “Come down with me and see if the boat is tied all right. I thought I heard her knocking against the pier. Girls, I guess you'd better pack up and get ready to go back. This is a nasty wind and I don't like to be out in the dark in this gale.”

Carol pouted but Ted hushed her at once.

“His engine isn't working right. He didn't say it because he thought some of the girls might be frightened.”

Carol turned pale.

“Really?”

“Yes, really.” Ted grabbed half a dozen

sandwiches before Ruth put the cover on the box, and with them in one hand and a banana in the other he leaned against a tree eating. He had missed the bacon and corn because of his stroll with Carol and he was feeling altogether hungry and a little annoyed.

A shout from the shore summoned the rest of the boys at a run. One of the ropes had broken and the boat was swinging out headed for home, and held only by a slender length of another rope. It was going to be a job to haul the boat back alongside the dock so the girls could get in, and all the boys were needed, some to pull, others to leap to the boat and paddle with the two oars that were always left in it.

By the time it was accomplished the girls had appeared, laughing excitedly. None of them knew anything about nervousness except Carol who had seen it all her days in her mother. She was white and silent as she climbed into the boat and did not join in the cheers as the engine finally sent out its comforting sputter before the regular chugging began.

They were off like a shot. Wind and waves

seemed to mock at the energetic little engine, sweeping the boat down the lake at a terrible rate. Bee and Jeanne glancing over the side of the little launch at the dark waters billowing past them, caught each other's hands and clung tight wordlessly.

Suddenly a voice shouted:

"Look!"

There were such fright and horror in the cry that they all turned, even Mr. Allen, to look back whence they had come.

The island was ablaze!

It was really a magnificent sight, for all its terrifying aspect. Great red flames rolling like a menacing army up to the sky; clouds of smoke blotting out the glare of the flames, then the fire triumphantly bursting through the curtain and reaching out with hungry arms to devour more of the little island.

"Oh, Mr. Allen," Bee cried. "What a shame."

"Now, do you know," he replied in his droll way, "I was just thinking how lucky it was we never built there!"

They kept their faces turned toward the doomed island, watching fascinated as the fire

progressed, leaping from point to point until they knew for a certainty by the outline in the flare of the light that every bit of it was burning and the place would be a gray desolate waste in the morning.

The sight got Bee started talking on forest fires and she gave a graphic account of one that her father and Jack had fought to prevent its reaching their fields of grain. They were all listening breathlessly to her tale when an exclamation from Mr. Allen interrupted them.

“Engine’s gone dead,” he announced.

An unexpected glimpse of Carol’s white face near a lantern led him to add:

“We’re more than half-way home; it’s a straight line to our dock and the wind and waves were doing most of the work anyway.”

The little party fell silent and the boat, with the red blaze behind it and blackness before it, sped on down the lake. Mr. Allen stood up, his solid square figure braced against the wind, the steering wheel gripped in both hands.

“I’m not sure I can get into the slip,” he said in a low voice to his nephew Pink. “It’s a swift right hand turn and the waves will

spoil it. I'm afraid I'll go aground and the boat will be knocked to pieces before morning. Guess we will have to try for the Club House dock."

"It's a little more sheltered in that curve of the shore. You probably wouldn't crash so hard," Pink rejoined.

"What I thought. You watch sharp, Pink; we're getting there. I can distinguish cottage lights. Yes, people are putting lanterns out on all the docks to guide us. Good! That helps. Here, Pink, help me turn her to the left. Now, hold hard! Be ready to jump, boys; got the ropes in your hands? All right,—give her a twist over the first post—Don't let us get by—Now!"

Ted and Victor leaped as a tremendous wave caught the little launch and hurled it at the Club House dock. In a second the little craft was tied fast but pitching from side to side in the heavy sea.

Bee looked up at the dock and laughed. "How will we ever get out now we're here?" she asked.

Anxious faces leaned down out of the darkness. Mrs. Stafford's, Ted's mother's, Mrs.

Allen's. Ted pushed the waiting figures back and, with Vic beside him, held out his hand.

"When the boat rocks toward the dock," he shouted, "you can reach our hands. Grab, pull and jump. We'll be ready!"

It was quite a stunt but it was fun for all but Carol. When she finally reached the dock she collapsed in a faint at the feet of Mrs. Stafford.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE PARTY GROWS

CAROL's fainting caused quite a little excitement. She was unconscious for only a few moments and was able to walk back to the cottage with Ted and Victor supporting her on either side, but she went right to bed when she got there. Ruth went with her, and before Carol went to sleep Ruth rubbed her head with camphor, chafed her hands and arms gently, brought her an ice cold drink of grape juice and generally fussed over her rather unnecessarily.

It had the effect of making Carol believe she was of much more importance and in more delicate health than she really was. Scraps of her mother's conversation came to memory. She recollected gestures and complaints and poses and for the next few days quite enjoyed playing invalid. Ruth, liking to nurse, and accustomed to taking care of people, fell into

the rôle of willing attendant quite easily. She was deft and capable. She possessed a smooth, cool, light touch and enjoyed Carol's praise as much as Carol enjoyed her massages. And it seemed to her hungry heart that her service was strengthening the band of friendship between them.

An incident, slight in itself, served to draw these two closer together, at the same time that it separated them from Bee and Jeanne's companionship. Mrs. Stafford, watching this new development in Carol with wise eyes, told Bee and Jeanne privately to ignore Carol's complaints, to laugh at her if necessary, and to try to get her back to a normal healthy point of view regarding herself.

An exceedingly hot day had put a stop to a climb up a neighboring mountain. The girls were in the cool gray living-room of the cottage after lunch, reading until swimming hour. Carol rose languidly, and with a hand on the chairs as she passed to steady herself, moved uncertainly toward the couch.

"This heat nauseates me," she murmured.

"Are you dizzy, Carol?" Ruth asked anxiously.

Carol nodded, slender fingers pressed against her forehead, her lips compressed as though in pain.

"Oh, can it, Carol," Bee said.

Carol opened indignant eyes but remembering her part, closed them again.

"My dear," she murmured, "I'm so sorry to distress you. This feeling is new to me. Perhaps after I've gotten used to it I shall be able to bear it better."

She could, in the instant, picture herself a chronic invalid, sweet and weary and palely beautiful. It was rather interesting.

"You are—what you call—bluffing," Jeanne said seriously. "You should be an actress," she added.

"I shall have to go up-stairs, Ruth," Carol said weakly; "the atmosphere is unsympathetic. It gets on my nerves and makes me worse. Don't come. Please don't bother."

But Ruth did come, indignant at Jeanne and Bee, utterly unaware that Carol's whole speech had been stolen verbatim from her mother.

Bee burst out laughing. Jeanne, with her finger on her lips, laughed too, silently. Mrs. Stafford entered, heard the story and with

a twinkle in her eyes guaranteed to cure Carol.

Carol lay on her bed up-stairs all the afternoon with Ruth beside her reading to her and fanning her. Bee and Jeanne went in swimming. Before they returned Carol heard a man's voice down-stairs talking to Aunt Bee. It was unfamiliar and for a long time the girls listened trying to catch a word, but the murmur was undistinguishable.

Suddenly the voice was in the living-room, on the stairs, and Aunt Bee, pausing at Carol's door, announced with a grave face that she had felt she must call a doctor.

He gave her a thorough examination, asked her many questions, and then snapped his glasses off and looking at her with keen gray eyes said abruptly:

"You have imaginitis. With proper encouragement from this young lady," he looked at Ruth, "you will soon be an utter bore to everyone about you and a useless piece of bric-à-brac to the world in general. The thing for you to do is get up."

He waited long enough to see the color rush to Carol's face.

“Don’t like what I said, do you? It’s true enough. I’m an old man, my dear, and I know women inside and out. You may be able to fool these folks but you can’t fool me.” Then without another word for her he stood talking to Aunt Bee for about fifteen minutes, moved abruptly to the door, turned then and said gruffly:

“Get up now, and go swimming.”

Down-stairs he told Mrs. Stafford that Carol had fainted from hunger (she had eaten little or no supper at the picnic) and fright.

There was nothing, of course, for Carol to do but drop her attitude of frailty. Although she did not go swimming that afternoon and told Ruth the doctor was probably a country ignoramus because she had been assured at home that she inherited her mother’s weak constitution, she could not meet Ruth’s eyes.

For Ruth was at the roots of her nature sensible and sincere. There was really no doubting the gruff doctor and there was a creeping doubt of Carol. She hated herself for it, but there it was. However, she possessed a strong sense of loyalty and a friendship was not a thing to be trifled with, so she

gave her wonder no opportunity to grow and agreed with Carol promptly.

But Carol had felt Ruth's momentary hesitation and burst out pettishly:

"Oh! go 'way! Go 'way! Don't you see I want to be alone?"

The dull color rose slowly to Ruth's face. Without a word she rose and with her bathing suit in hand, went down to the boat house. A solitary swim did not soothe her hurt feelings and the first little stiffness crept up between herself and Carol.

Hot weather, which kept the girls shut in the shadowed house together and successfully ended all plans for social activities in the day-time, made a difficult business more difficult. The weather was unbearable. Day after day of scorching breathless sunshine when even the water in the lake was so warm as not to be refreshing, and night after night of interminable sticky hours.

No one wanted to dance, even, and the little Club House was deserted, the Victrola was stilled, as listless young people sat on the rocks near the water's edge trying to maintain an appearance of politeness and interest.

But it was hard to do. The girls, cooped up through the noontime heat of successive days, found their tongues getting edgy.

Ruth, whose solid weight made the hot weather more uncomfortable for her than anyone, lounged about the cottage in a spotted kimono, her black hair oily with perspiration, her face shining. She "didn't care a hang." It was too "beastly hot to think about looks." She had to "struggle enough" when she went out, but she'd be "jiggered" if she'd stay "all dolled up" in the privacy of the cottage.

"You ought at least to think of others, if you won't think of yourself," Carol flashed. "We have to sit and look at you."

Carol spent most of her time washing herself. She was always cool looking, with her fair hair and clear pink complexion, and she managed somehow to look at ease when the others were miserably hot. She could stay dressed in white the entire day and by evening be as immaculate as she was in the morning.

She was as maddening a spectacle to Ruth as Ruth was to her, and the two of them began digging at each other.

"If I wanted to monopolize the bathroom,

"I could look cool too," Ruth said. "You were in there two hours this morning. How you take so long——"

"Reading in the bathtub," Bee made a venture, not at all to rouse Carol, but in a vain effort to turn the conversation. "What was your book?"

But Carol misunderstood. She took Bee's random guess as an accusation and her temper, variable at best, boiled over. She was lying on the couch, a book in her hand, and as Bee spoke, she raised her arm and hurled the book at Bee's head.

"That, if you must know everything—prowling and peeping at me——"

But she stopped suddenly. The book had hit Bee on the cheek and a red gash appeared suddenly. Carol was as much frightened by that as she was by the whiteness of the rest of Bee's face which bent over her the next second. Bee shook her until her teeth rattled, little drops of blood dropping down on her white dress and frightened face, then, still in a silent anger, Bee fled to her room.

Ruth and Jeanne sat transfixed. The whole affair had transpired in less than a moment.

Carol was the first to recover. With a shiver of disgust at the spots of blood on her, she rose and walked with dignity up to her room. Ruth's mouth closed slowly and she looked questioningly at Jeanne.

The little French-American girl sat still, small hands tightly clasped in her lap, her large brown eyes with fires smouldering in their depths, following Carol's slow exit from the room. When she had gone Jeanne drew a shivering breath, caught her under lip in her teeth and ran from the room toward the boat house, but not before Ruth had caught a glimpse of large tears splashing down a white face.

A few moments later Mrs. Stafford appeared, a letter in her hand.

"Why, where has everyone gone?" she asked.

"Bee and Carol are up in their rooms and Jeanne went to the boat house, I think."

Mrs. Stafford gave Ruth a keen look, but asking no more questions, she went to the boat house after Jeanne.

She found her curled up in the hammock, her dark eyes gazing somberly out over the blue

water, her bobbed hair clinging in moist curls to her face and neck.

With a smile of greeting, Mrs. Stafford drew a rocking-chair up to the hammock, and, sitting down, pulled the letter from its envelope.

"It's from Mrs. Johnson," she explained. "Troubles seem to pile upon her. Little Margaret has scarlet fever."

"Oh!" Jeanne's little gasp was all of pity. Her own affairs forgotten for the moment, she sat up to hear the news.

Harry and Steve had not been exposed. They had been away for the week-end camping when the doctor pronounced the baby's illness scarlet fever, and on their return a neighbor had taken them in. But the neighbor already had her hands and house full and could not keep the boys more than two or three days. Mrs. Johnson was almost frantic trying to decide where she could put them.

Mrs. Stafford laid down the letter and looked at Jeanne.

"I was wondering if we could help in any way," she remarked.

"To have them here, you mean," Jeanne

smiled at her mother. "You precious beautiful. That's what you want to do, but you want me to want them too. Mother, *cherie*, how you do manage to smooth out all my churned up insides! Just to look at you is cream-pie."

She considered the proposition a moment, then laughed a bit ruefully.

"I don't see how it could make matters worse to have them up. We're all fighting like Kilkenny cats now. Is that a *thunder-cloud*, Mother?"

Jeanne sat up excitedly, peering across the blue to the hills' dark tops where a shadow or a cloud was hanging menacingly.

"I believe it is. The paper predicted a storm and cooler weather."

"That settles it. If it gets cooler the boys can come. At least——" Jeanne stopped suddenly. Her mother looked a question but Jeanne shook her head. She had been going to say that at least the boys' presence would make Ruth dress, but she checked it.

The storm burst upon them at supper time. With the wind lashing the rain against the windows and the lake churned into a gray fury, the girls forgot for the moment their differ-

ences, and the stiffness that had made them exceedingly polite throughout the meal vanished in the groans of relief as coolness crept into the stuffy rooms.

It was then that Jeanne announced the pending arrival of two more guests. They had all heard of Harry and Steve and when they were told that a telegram would be sent and the boys would probably arrive the following afternoon, excitement reached a high pitch.

“Thank goodness for some new boys!” Carol cried, a flush on each cheek. “Vic’s such a bear—and Ted—I used to think he was funny but he’s worn out all his jokes, and his manners—I don’t know what’s happened to them. He used to be beautifully polite. Now he never even thinks of getting up when I come around.”

Jeanne and Bee exchanged glances that Carol did not see. The reason for Ted’s lapse in manners was clear enough to them.

“How old are they, Jeanne?” Carol rushed in. “Nearly sixteen and seventeen? Oh! how exciting! Harry is the good-looking one, isn’t he? The fusser?”

It was interesting to Mrs. Stafford, listen-

ing quietly in a corner, to note that Bee's enthusiasm sounded a quite different note. With two more boys, there'd be enough for them to get up a baseball team, boys versus girls, and oh! couldn't they have a meet? A field meet, only have water sports too? There could be canoe races and swimming races and tub races and a greased pole and the baseball game to end up with—or begin with, whichever ———

Up to this point Ruth had been silent. The coming of the boys meant but one thing for her—an agony of self-consciousness and embarrassment here in the cottage, the one place where she had begun to feel at ease. She was not glad, not at all glad they were coming. They liked Jeanne already, they would "fall" for Carol, as the boys all did, and they would treat Bee like a jolly sister. Ruth would be in the way ———

Her dreary thoughts were reflected in her face but at Bee's suggestion of a Regatta her eyes lit up. That would be fun. And possibly she would have her chance to shine. She was the best girl swimmer, except for Carol, and she did believe on long distances she could

beat her. At any rate, she could dive the best.

And possibly—just possibly—these boys would be “different.” They might not judge a girl by her slimness and fairness. They might be able to see that sometimes there was no virtue beneath beauty—Ruth was thinking of Carol—and sometimes there was hidden gold beneath a plain exterior.

It was her dream that somewhere existed the “different” boy and sometime she and he would meet.

Mightn't it happen this summer, after all, at this house party which had seemed when she had looked forward to it like the golden gate to paradise. Mightn't it be for them she had worked so hard to renovate her clothes?

So her enthusiasm over the prospect of the new guests, though belated, was sincere enough to satisfy Jeanne who had rather anxiously laid the proposal before her different guests.

Her flashing look to her mother was one of triumph. The boys would receive a warm welcome. She could trust them to keep it warm. Mrs. Stafford sent a telegram that night asking the boys to come the next day.

CHAPTER VI

GAIETIES BEGIN

THE next day a stiff north breeze blew from the hills down the length of the lake. The waters were a deep blue capped with frothy white, the green pines, their fragrance drawn out by the warm sun, flung it far and wide joyously. The hills, purpled by shadows from swift masses of clouds, seemed in the clear light to have crept closer about Lake Sunnapine, as though guarding its beauty more jealously than ever. It was, indeed, as the four girls decided on the wind-swept verandah, a "perfect day."

Jeanne, in a black sweater pulled over a black and white wool skirt with black and white sport shoes on her slim feet, stood on the porch and stretched out her arms to the wind, laughing and blushing in a little self-consciousness at her act.

Bee, from the swing, regarded her curiously.

What a darling she was, she thought. The two of them had formed a very real friendship and as if in cognizance of the fact, Jeanne turned to her cousin and tried to explain her action.

“I am so happy,” she put her hand on her heart as she spoke and lowered her voice though they were alone on the porch, Ruth and Carol not having come down yet. “I have such a queer feeling that something wonderful is going to happen—not to-day, but soon. Perhaps it’s just because I think we are all going to get along better here.” She nodded up-stairs.

Bee thrust her hands deep in the pockets of her heavy red sweater. It was opened down the front over her white dress. Her short black hair was blowing wildly about her cheeks.

“There’s a lull in the storm anyway,” she cried cheerfully. “A signed truce while the boys are here. Let’s make ’em stay!”

As they probably would stay for six weeks, Jeanne suddenly realized her duties as hostess would be arduous. There must be “something doing” all the time. In a businesslike way she went in to get pad and pencil as Ruth and

Carol appeared, and while they were waiting for Katie to call them to breakfast they started to plan a good time menu.

"Everybody give suggestions. You first, Bee."

Bee promptly suggested sailing that day. After consulting with Mrs. Stafford, Jeanne found out that a sailboat could be hired in the village. Arrangements were at once made over the telephone and Jeanne announced triumphantly at the breakfast table that *that* was settled. It was Carol's turn next.

Carol, looking very attractive in a brown wool jersey dress, the skirt pleated in countless tiny pleats, the overblouse, with a bright orange bow at the neck, and some gay embroidery on the broad belt in front, was as prompt as Bee with her suggestion.

"Let's go to the park to dance to-morrow night. Couldn't we, Aunt Bee? You've promised us for a long time we might. These little dances at the Club are so—so—home-made. I want a real orchestra for a change."

Aunt Bee's consent being given, attention was turned to breakfast. Katie's hot corn-bread brought exclamations of delight from the

girls who had soon discovered that the best way to get on with Katie was to give her large doses of her own blarney. Katie, her nose in the air over their foolishness, her pleasure at their flattery poorly concealed, filled the plate three times.

After breakfast was over the girls went on with their planning. Ruth suggested a picnic at Glen Lake, a place they had talked of exploring for many days. It was the next of a chain of seven lakes all of which emptied into Lake Sunnapine. It was reached by motor boat and a short walk through woods of a mile or so. It meant a picnic and the going and coming would consume a full day.

Jeanne wanted to climb Bear Cat Mountain. It could be seen from the village, looming higher than any other about them. To get on the trail up they would have to go in automobiles fifteen miles to the next town north, which lay at the base of Bear Cat.

This also would consume a day.

Once given the impetus it was not hard to plan activities. There were to be tennis tournaments, baseball games, beach parties, Field Meets and Regattas,—everything that

four inventive imaginative girls hungry for good times could think of—with plenty of dancing and swimming sprinkled in between.

As Jeanne saw Carol's interest brighten her and send chasing that scornful dissatisfied look that lay so often on her face she blamed herself for not having done this sooner and yet it was not entirely her fault. The heat had interfered. Jeanne realized that Aunt Bee was right. So long as Carol was interested she was charming. And so long as she was agreeable Ruth's pleasure was at least half-way assured. Jeanne regretfully admitted to herself that it must be some miracle now that would give Ruth the kind of a good time she knew she had dreamed of, but at least her happiness in the house, which rested entirely with the girls, could be managed. Jeanne felt that Ruth was counting a good deal on this unexpected friendship with Carol. It was flattering and pleasant in many ways—so long as Carol was content. Jeanne thought her part in Ruth's joy lay in seeing that Carol didn't hurt or disappoint her, lay in keeping her interested. At any rate, if Carol ever



A SAILBOAT WITH ITS WHITE SAILS BILLOWING

should turn mean, she and Bee would stand by Ruth. This they had decided in one of their many whispered conversations in bed when lights were out.

That afternoon the fun began. The four girls, with Ted and Vic and Mrs. Stafford piled into the big limousine and went racing in a cloud of dust down to the station to meet the four o'clock train. The formality of introductions was dispensed with in a breezy haste characteristic of the modern young person of to-day.

Harry and Steve, dusty and dishevelled, forgot their apprehension at the thought of being with four girls when they saw Vic and Ted tumbling out of the car to greet them like old friends. And when the car drew up at a dock in the channel and they saw a sailboat with its white sails billowing in the breeze the guests grinned happily at Jeanne and vouchsafed a deeply breathed:

“Gee!”

Mrs. Stafford went home in the car, entrusting the eight young people to a weather-beaten old man who was a familiar landmark in the village of Sunnapine.

"Take care of them, Dick. Don't let them do any monkeyshines."

Dick promised solemnly with a slow wink to the young crowd, and woof! they were off!

They tacked up to the island which they had not seen since the day of the fire. Its gaunt, brown pines, thrusting stiff arms up against a blue sky, spoiled the beauty about them. They looked away from the devastated place, circled it and swooped back toward the beach like a bird in flight.

Three times they did this and on their last return, as the sun dropped behind the hills, the breeze sank suddenly. The sails, a moment before crackling and snapping in the wind, flapped a sad farewell to the day's rioting.

The boys tossed pennies to see who should pole them ashore and the luck went against the guests with Ted and Vic grinning derisively at them. Harry and Steve shed their coats, flung their long dark locks out of their eyes and set vigorously to the business of getting ashore.

The girls sat laughing up at them with their arms trailing in the water, and in the minds of each was the same thought. How good-looking these boys were! Their efforts sent a rich

color flooding their tanned cheeks, their eyes were bright, their muscles corded in their arms, their stalwart figures poised bravely against a turquoise sky. They were a contrast to the fair-haired twins, Vic and Ted, and were utterly unconscious of their charm.

It took them an hour to pole to shore. The boys wanted a swim and Mrs. Stafford didn't have the heart to refuse them, so they scurried down to the boat house while the girls dashed to their rooms to dress for dinner and the evening. They had been invited over to the Van Tynes' for singing and pop-corn before a fire.

At Carol's suggestion Ruth wore a white pleated skirt with a deep yellow sport sweater and yellow silk stockings. She had washed her hair that morning and had it up in curlers while she was dressing. When she finally went down-stairs—the last girl to appear—everyone exclaimed that she had never looked so well.

It was true. Her skin, cleared by a self-imposed diet, had tanned a beautiful tan, and to-night, with a new feeling of self-confidence and excitement, her great eyes were blazing like stars. At the supper table she didn't say much

but she was conscious of Steve's gaze on her and her heart fluttered happily. Perhaps it was to happen! Perhaps Steve was the different one.

In the confusion after dinner of getting on wraps and starting off, Ruth found herself beside Steve. (Carol had appropriated Harry and gone ahead, Bee and Jeanne followed.) At once she became terrified. What to say? Her tongue dried, her breath came fast. Steve, no longer turning admiring eyes on her, hurried along by her side, his glance seeking out Jeanne's curly head of bronze topping a white sweater she had drawn over a lavender dress. Ruth's heart sank and as she reached the Van Tynes' big living-room softly aglow with Japanese lanterns and the young people milled about with a pretended carelessness until they were next whom they wanted, she sank into the nearest chair and remained fastened there in a dreary despair.

It was no good, absolutely no good. Her best effort wasted because she couldn't talk. It wasn't looks alone. She had been good-looking. It was because she couldn't laugh and chatter and be frivolous. Look at Carol

over there, acting like a fool, fussing with her hair, saying silly nothings, but a group of boys about her were snatching a dance card back and forth among them scribbling their names in furiously for the next night. Carol's voice came to her ears clear, light, laughing.

"You're ridiculous! Nobody has dance cards. Indeed I shan't keep it. See!" she tossed it lightly into the fire. "There it goes! First come, first served! That's all." Humming a gay little air she walked away carelessly. Imagine! Walking away from boys!

Ruth knew she would have stayed, feverishly trying to keep them all about her. And would she have thrown away a dance card? Never! Perhaps it was that—"I don't care" about Carol. Look! they were all following after. Somebody bringing the handkerchief and scarf that Ruth knew she had deliberately dropped.

Ruth's eyes turned to Bee. 'A' different picture here. Bee was sitting on the arm of a chair, an arm flung over the back of it, her feet stretched before her. The fire was at her back outlining in its red light her dark head; one fair hand was describing circles in the air. Steve, leaning forward, listening eagerly, was

Jeanne's House Party

lost to the crowd as Bee told how she had first learned to use a lasso. She had on a white dress, her best, but one of the simplest to be seen. Distinctly clothes didn't matter here.

Ruth rose and hoping no one saw her solitary state, slipped to the rear of the house. There were voices here, people getting butter and salt and pop-corn. She could always be useful, if not ornamental. Ah! Here were Jeanne and Harry, alone. Too late she ducked back. Jeanne had seen her and gaily summoned her to her side. Feeling terribly in the way, Ruth joined the two, a silent listener to the conversation. Jeanne had slipped a hand through Ruth's arm and there was no possible escape.

She stood by, watching in silent admiration and envy Jeanne's sweet expressive face. There was a sweetness in Jeanne's eyes that Carol lacked, and ease that the downright Bee did not possess. Jeanne could be an interesting talker or an eager listener. Carol never listened. Bee did, but she didn't know how to keep on listening, how to draw people out, as Jeanne did. But that didn't matter with Bee, because she was such a chatterbox. She

could talk endlessly, and always say something.

Yes, Jeanne had what Ruth wanted. Jeanne had charm—that rare something that seems to combine personality, brains and beauty.

Ruth looked down at her hand resting on Jeanne's slim arm and she sighed. It was square and brown and ugly—like the rest of her. It was all useless. She wished she could hurry up and grow old and be content with her dreams, with looking on at life. Perhaps being an old maid wasn't so awful once you were. You could at least pretend you had a romance, but now! bah! whom could she fool? Not even herself with this beastly lump of tears in her throat.

It was a wretched evening for Ruth. There was no piano in the cottage, so she was not needed there. The popping of corn was too simple a matter to require skillful cooking. Besides it was so hot a business that they had to take turns. When it came to stunts Bee and the Allen girls were always in the middle of things with the boys. Carol held herself aloof fastidiously, Jeanne because she claimed

she was stupid about untying knots and guessing riddles. But with Ruth it was sheer fright—self-consciousness—that kept her on the outside of the fun. Finally when her loneliness grew too great to be borne, she slipped unobserved out of the house and stole home. On the verandah she met Aunt Bee and mumbling—"headache" she reached the privacy of her room before the tears came.

No one noticed her absence for a while. Jeanne was the first to miss her and asked Bee in a low voice where she was. Quietly they hunted around and at last concluded to make up a headache story for her when it came time to say good-night.

Which Jeanne did so well that no one suspected. But on the way home through the woods, she caught Bee's arm and signalled her to let Carol go ahead with the two boys.

"You understand, Bee?"

Bee nodded soberly.

"What can I do?"

"I don't know."

CHAPTER VII

THE SPOOK HOUSE

WHAT Jeanne did was to get hold of the boys individually, Vic and Ted, Steve and Harry, Pink and Rodney, and talk to them as earnestly and honestly as they had never been talked to by a girl. They were genuinely surprised at Jeanne's attitude, accustomed rather to having each girl look out for her own popularity and let bad luck take the hindmost. But they were finally made to see what Jeanne honestly believed, that in a way they shared her duty as hosts. They must see to it that Ruth enjoyed herself at the dance at the park. She had with great difficulty been persuaded to go.

The big steamer stopped at the Club House dock at seven—sunset hour. After it had picked up everyone from the point, it moved silently around the lake, making about four stops in all, to take people to the park.

The night was beautiful. There was no moon but millions of stars shining clearly in the heavens lighted the darkness. As well as it could be managed, Jeanne kept Ruth beside her, and the rest of the boys and girls around, singing all the way over.

The pavilion was open to the air except for the roof. To it swarmed boys and girls and men and women from all the neighboring towns. It was filled with all kinds of people and was a revelation to Carol. She was at first disgusted to be so close to these queerly dressed, odd-mannered county folk, but decided at last to enjoy it as she had been the one to urge it, so she spent a good deal of her time laughing at them, audibly commenting on their crudities.

For Ruth the evening was not the usual dreadful one. Harry and Steve both danced with her and they were so full of enthusiasm over everything that conversation seemed to move along easily enough. Then came Ted and Victor—they had learned to do their “duty dance” rather decently—and that was four gone, with the Allen boys to look forward to. Later Ruth was swept along in a jolly

crowd from the outdoor pavilion where the dancing was going on, down to the soda fountain under the trees. Here Ted, who was standing the treat, suddenly discovered he possessed only a lonely dime. Not one whit abashed he gaily ordered "one lemonade with five straws" and, grave as a judge, passed the glass down the line of giggling girls he had so politely invited, counting with deep concern and an eye to his own happiness, the number of swallows each was allowed.

When half the glass was emptied he coolly finished the contents and marched back up the hill with his arm through two of the girls'.

Carol, of course, disappeared during the evening in the darkness of the trees, with Harry. She reappeared once or twice, to disappear with a different partner. Bee grunted disgustedly. Jeanne grew a little anxious as the warning whistle from the boat came up to them for the last time. Mrs. Stafford finally sent the boys scouring in different directions. They were all to meet at the dock in five minutes. When they gathered breathless and hot at the gangplank, later, they were all annoyed to see Carol's face with its cool smile

looking down at them from the upper deck. Ted was beside her.

"We thought you were going to miss the boat," she called.

"Why in time don't ya stay with the crowd?" Victor demanded in hot anger of his brother. "Make Mrs. Stafford worry and she has to send us flying all over the park for you."

Ted answered nothing but his glance spoke volumes. It touched Carol significantly, as he shrugged his shoulders. No one but Mrs. Stafford saw his silent reply to his brother but her face was grave as she listened to Carol's pert reply, meant for her, but given to Victor.

"We aren't in the kindergarten."

Up on the deck Jeanne called for silence a moment and when she could be heard, she said: "About the picnic at Glen Lake tomorrow ——"

"Oh! Pink says there are haunted houses over there!" Dorothy cried. "Do we want to go?"

There was a chorus of cries, dissenting and assenting. But the more curious won the vote. So it was decided they should start early in the morning and have an all day picnic.

The next day was glorious with sparkling blue waters and brilliant gold sunshine, and the distant hills changing from deep green to rich purple under the shadowy clouds.

An hour's boat ride in two bouncing motor boats brought them to the little deserted village in a bay of the lake. Here there had once been an active slate quarry but the place lay silent now under the hot summer's sun, livened only by the incessant chirping of grasshoppers and the buzzing of flies.

Some dozen or more houses were scattered along the broad trail from Lake Sunnapine to Glen Lake, and these with their tumbling roofs, broken steps and dark windows from which the glass had long since disappeared, sent a shiver over the girls and set the boys daring each other to inspection.

One house in particular standing in the cold dark shadow of the wood fascinated them by its gloom. Neglected vines had clambered up over the top windows, completely shutting out any light that might have ventured to peep in. Cobwebs hung in dirty thick masses from the eaves of the verandah, birds flew soundlessly in and out of the gaping lower windows, and

a wayward stream of water, creeping from a broken pipe back of the house, had spread stealthily over part of the lopsided verandah, coating it with a slimy green moss over which tiny snakes and black bugs writhed and burrowed.

"Dare you to go in, Vic," Ted cried eagerly to his brother.

"Aw! g'wan in yourself. Nothing but bats and snakes in there."

"Spiders and mice," added Harry with a teasing look at the girls. "Let's all go in." He grasped Carol and Ruth by the hands, trying to pull them forward.

The girls shivered and cried out an indignant protest.

"Double dare you, Ted," Steve cried suddenly, his eyes gleaming under a fallen lock of dark hair.

"You mean you will if I will?"

Steve nodded.

Ted gave him a curious look. This from Steve, the quieter of the two, was surprising, but Steve apparently meant business, judging by the look on his face. So rather reluctantly Ted agreed.

“ Done. Do we go now? ”

As Steve nodded Bee remonstrated.

“ Oh, no, boys, please. Leave it for another day. We’ve got to get over to Glen Lake—it’s a two mile walk—and start cooking dinner, or we’ll never have time for a swim. Leave your exploring till another day. Will you? Or suppose we all stop on the way home; will that satisfy you? ”

An apparent unwillingness to abandon the project effectually hid from the admiring girls a very real sense of relief at the boys’ mutual escape and when a definite promise had been exacted from each of them to stop on the way back, the party travelled on. Once out of the little stretch of woods with the deserted houses behind them, they burst out singing and whistling and the “ Spook House ” was forgotten for the time.

Glen Lake was shaped like the figure eight. The second loop was the objective, for here there was a beautiful high bluff, open to the sun with short soft grass awaiting them, a well made fireplace and a high rock excellent for dining or diving purposes. For those who preferred wading in, a beautiful sandy beach,

which stretched out almost a quarter of a mile, offered a fine place for beginners.

A wagon road, which led along the shore and passed a few summer cottages, finally brought them to the bluff and here preparations for dinner were immediately begun. Steve and Harry had offered to make flapjacks for this particular party and there had been much laughing skepticism as to their cooking ability. When it was discovered that Aunt Jemina's pancake flour had been left safely tucked under the seat in the motor boat back on Lake Sunnapiine a howl of derision arose.

"You did it on purpose! We knew you couldn't cook! Good excuse!"

Harry would have laughed off the situation and lazily told the crowd to make the best of it, but the sleeping lion in Steve was aroused. He was determined to go back to the lake and get the box and when Harry flatly refused to go with him, he turned to Ted.

A significant glance unnoticed by the others passed between the two, and with a command to the girls to save some of the rest of the dinner till they returned, the two started back.

"Why don't you borrow that motor boat

from the first cottage down the road? You could save that two-mile walk and be back in half the time!" Harry called after them.

"Good idea! Thanks." And the boys disappeared from sight behind the trees.

In fifteen minutes the picnickers were startled by the put-put of an engine and looking up they saw a motor boat going in crazy rapid circles out on the lake. In it were Steve and Ted, standing, and apparently convulsed with laughter.

"It'll only go backward or in circles," they shouted to the group on shore. "Good-bye! We're off. We don't know where we're going but we're on our way. **SAVE US SOME LUNCH.**"

At that moment the boat, describing a larger circle than usual, grounded on the sand-bar. The difficulty of dislodging it only strengthened the boys' determination to see the thing through to a finish, and despite the fact that Bee shouted that the steak was all cooked and the potatoes nearly boiled, they waved a cheerful good-bye and shot off down the lake backward.

"Silly things," Carol said disdainfully.

“They’ll never get back. It would serve them right if we didn’t save a thing.”

And when two o’clock came and went without a sign of the boys, Harry fell on to their share with a whoop. Utterly callous of the remonstrances of the tender-hearted girls, he ate both pieces of steak and had started on the corn and potatoes when the Allen boys discovered him and made him divide even.

By the time the pots and pans were washed and the paper plates and napkins burned, everyone was hot enough and sticky enough for a swim. The boys put up a small tent for the girls, and then they themselves disappeared in the woods. Jeanne had by this time learned to swim fairly well, but Bee, with a lifetime of athletic activities behind her, had become most proficient. To-day she ventured diving for the first time and though she repeatedly went flat with a resounding whack and an enormous splash, she was always game to try again.

It was four o’clock before the last one came up out of the water and five before they at last started back along the road toward their motor boats. The general feeling was that the boys had such difficulty with their crazy little

motor boat that by the time they reached Lake Sunnapine they had either gone home or begged a luncheon from one of the cottage people on Glen Lake. In either case they were to be scorned rather than pitied.

By the time the young people reached the dark little stretch of woods where the "Spook House" was hidden they were all more or less silent with weariness and Harry's sudden abrupt reminder that they must go investigating as they had all promised, met with slight enthusiasm.

"It was Steve and Ted who wanted it most, and they're not here," Carol said as they hesitated before the sombre looking building.

"But we promised," Harry said, the spirit of adventure lit in him because of the opposition he encountered. "I'm going!" he declared suddenly; "anybody else with me?"

Bee, shivering, admitted she rather wanted to peek inside. The Allen boys, not to be outdone by a girl, marched forward with them, but Carol and the other girls went on down the road toward sunlight while Jeanne paused undecided.

"Come on, Jeanne," Bee called in an encouraging voice, and that settled the matter. With a wave of her hand to the departing members of the crowd she ran lightly up on the rickety porch after the others.

Harry found the door broken off its hinges and hanging drunkenly in the room. Bravely he stepped inside, then ducked suddenly as a bat circled swiftly over his head. The two girls held back a scream and clutched each other and in the sudden cessation of talk and laughter they heard a faint moan.

"Oh!" Jeanne cried. "What was that?"

"Ghosts," the Allen boys cried simultaneously.

"Told you it was a spook house," Harry said in a loud voice, but it was to be noticed that no one had advanced farther into the room where a half dozen bats were wheeling in their dreadful still low flight.

"Hark! Let's see if we hear it again," Bee suggested, and they all stood silent, listening.

This time it was not a moan but a heavy labored breathing that came to their ears. It seemed to be above them and Harry, suddenly

bolder than the rest, walked over to the foot of the tumbled down staircase discernible to them in the dark.

“Steve,” he shouted suddenly, and after a moment of suspense there came again to their ears the moan they had first heard.

Without a word, Harry was up the stairs, climbing recklessly over piles of fallen plaster and leaping the gaps where steps had crumbled to pieces, disappearing in the murky blackness above.

The rest were instantly ready to follow but Harry called down in natural voice that instantly dispelled the eerie gruesomeness of the place:

“The girls mustn’t come up. It isn’t safe. But you boys will have to. Steve and Ted are hurt and need help.”

So Vic and the Allen boys scrambled up the stairs after Harry, and the sound of a low whistle came down to the girls waiting in an agony of suspense below.

When at last, after many sounds of shoving and scuffling and hurrying about up-stairs there came to them the sound of Steve’s voice weak but carrying a note of sanity and humor, they

caught each other's hands with a sudden sigh of thankfulness.

"Thought we'd put one over," Steve said, faintly, "but the spooks put one on—us."

"I'll say they did. Hold still now, Steve. Don't be in a hurry." And Steve, his arm about his brother with one of the Allen boys supporting him on the other side, half slid, half walked down the stairway.

Once they got him down they went back for Ted and the girls got Steve out in the sun and air. He sprawled limply under a tree while Jeanne's deft fingers bound up an ugly cut on his head with a handkerchief soaked in the lake.

"That's a mean one," she said, bathing his head when she had finished. "Are you hurt anywhere else, Steve?"

"No. That knocked me west for a while though. What time is it?"

"Five-thirty," said Bee.

Steve whistled. And then, in slow tones, with big pauses he told the story.

He and Ted had spent two hours getting back to Lake Sunnapine and by that time they were so hungry that they decided to stop at the first cottage and beg a lunch. Which

they did, and were treated so royally that the time went by before they knew it, and it was three-thirty. They then couldn't get the motor boat going again so they telephoned the owner, told him where they had left it and started back, determined to wait in their own motor boat for the rest of the party.

As they passed the "Spook House" they suddenly thought it would be a great lark to hide here and scare the rest as they went by, by shrieks and groans and other weird noises. But before they had finished investigating themselves Steve was horrified to hear a sudden grinding tear and to see a huge beam slowly sink and a part of the roof of the house coming down on top of them. He cried out and jumped and though he escaped the beam, a flying stick struck him on the head, knocking him senseless, and when he came to he was jammed down under a pile of light debris that nearly smothered him.

"Where's Ted?" Jeanne asked quietly and Steve, looking up into her frightened eyes, answered the truth quietly.

"Pinned under the big beam—unconscious. I don't know how badly off he is. I am going

back in there now." He struggled up to a sitting position just as a sober group emerged from the doorway carrying on a rudely improvised stretcher the still form of Ted.

"Broken leg, chest hurt," Vic said briefly. "That's all we know. Better move along, boys, as fast as possible, to the boats."

It was a rather sober crowd that finally gathered at the dock and settled in the two motors again, but the tension was relieved to some extent when Ted, cruelly hurt by the shift onto the floor of the boat, groaned, then opened his eyes for a brief moment and said painfully:

"Hello, everybody."

CHAPTER VIII

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

TED's injuries proved not to be serious, although to him they were serious enough. A dislocated wrist, a cut and bruised chest were painful though endurable, but a broken leg meant that his fun for the summer was over. He was not allowed to see anyone outside the family for a few days because he was running a slight fever, so though it seemed a bit heartless to go on without him, it was really the only thing to do. It thus happened Jeanne's planned activities were not interfered with.

The day after the picnic at Glen Lake had been set for the climb up Bear Cat Mountain. Jeanne and her guests were all at breakfast discussing the luncheon problem—should they take it prepared or cook it on top of the mountain?—when James appeared with the mail.

Mrs. Stafford always folded the newspaper

quietly away for reading at a later date for she had learned that war talk shadowed Jeanne's eyes, and the little dread that lay deep in the heart of Bee for her brother crept into her face to linger.

This morning, however, the head-lines leaped at her, and an involuntary exclamation drew all eyes to her, hushing the inconsequent chatter like a cold wind.

"What is it, *cherie*?"

Jeanne, white-faced, rose as she asked the question and went quickly to Mrs. Stafford's chair. Leaning over her shoulder she followed the account that her mother read aloud to the shocked group of young people.

"Sinking of the *Galveston*."

"Tom's ship," Jeanne murmured. "Go on."

The *Galveston*, it was reported, had been struck by a submarine in the danger zone and had sunk almost immediately. More than half the crew had perished in the high seas, the captain going down with his ship. The names of the survivors were printed below.

Breathless, her little hands clenched, Jeanne's eyes raced down the pitifully small

list of those saved. Her good captain gone! There was no doubt about that. But Tom! Young laughing Tom! had he been sucked down in the black cold water too? G-H-I-J-K—Karder, Kamby, Kelly, George Kelly, Michael Kelly, Pat Kelly, Tom!

There it was. Tom Kelly! Tears suddenly flooded Jeanne's straining eyes and with a little sob she rushed from the room.

The news shook her as nothing had for months. Mrs. Stafford, going up to her later, found her trembling, her brown eyes dilated to black with her imaginative forebodings. She could not seem to rid herself of a dreadful fear for Dr. Jack, and Mrs. Stafford thought for a while that the day's climb to the top of Bear Cat must be postponed. It happened to be Carol's selfishness that restored Jeanne's poise.

Mrs. Stafford had gone down again to the young people who were gathered in a quiet group on the verandah. In a low voice she explained that Jeanne was not well enough to consider the climb and they could either go without her or postpone the trip until another day.

"Oh, we'll postpone it, of course," Bee cried quickly.

"We wouldn't think of going without her," Harry said, and Mrs. Stafford, with a nod, turned back into the house to consult Katie.

"Well, I think it's a rotten shame!" Carol's clear voice, higher in her pique, rose through the still air to Jeanne's window. "She's just like M'amselle—glooming the whole party because of her sorrow. It seems to be the French way, but I call it selfish. And what's the point anyway? Tom's *safe*. It isn't as though he were dead."

"You aren't the only one to have nerves," Bee remarked pointedly, but it was Steve, not Bee, who brought Carol to her senses.

"The captain is, though, and he was her friend." Steve spoke up, his eyes on Carol in a contemptuous gaze that dried up her angry retort. To be liked and admired by all boys—that was her creed in life at present. And here she was met by cold scorn. She saw she had made a mistake and she hastened to rectify it.

"Oh, of course. I forgot that. Well, then, naturally she feels badly ——"

But Jeanne herself interrupted them. She stood in the doorway, still white, still a little shaken, but with a calmness in her eyes that held determination unshakable.

“It is time to start, is it not?” she asked quietly. “Steve, please call Victor and the Allens. I will see if lunch is ready. Or perhaps ——” she smiled at the girls. “Hadn’t we all better help Katie and Mother Stafford? We will get off sooner.”

So composed and quiet was her manner that there was no question raised even by Mother Stafford. One glance into Jeanne’s eyes and she turned to the business of putting up baskets and boxes of lunch, and in less than an hour the young people were climbing merrily into two big automobiles that were to take them to the foot of the big mountain.

Jeanne was the gayest of them all. She was in the car with Carol and Steve, Ruth and Harry and one of the Allens. Her manner was always happy, but usually it was Bee’s wholesome love of fun or Carol’s recklessness that led them into laughter. Jeanne in a group was a follower except at crucial moments. But to-day with her eyes shining and a high

color in both cheeks she surprised them all by her vivacity. Carol, rather used to being the ring-leader, sank into a silence that gradually became sullen, but Ruth, reading in Jeanne's eyes a vague call for help, rallied to the situation and came out with some bits of drollery that surprised herself.

Their car reached Bear Cat first and Jeanne was off up the trail, her little lunch box swinging at her side on a strap, her sneakered feet dancing before the rest of them were fairly out of the car.

Steve was beside her almost instantly, Ruth and Harry came next, but Carol and the Allen boy preferred to wait for the other car. They had met with a blow-out and were delayed by the necessary changing of a shoe, so that the four who had started ahead reached the top and had time for a long talk before the rest joined them.

For Ruth, that climb held one of the happiest memories she took home with her. Jeanne's unnatural exuberance fell from her before they were half-way to the top and she was her sweet natural self again, drawing Ruth into a warm companionship that she had felt so shut away.

from ever since her arrival. With Jeanne to take the lead conversationally, with Steve to meet their earnestness and Harry to lift them from solemnity, and Ruth forgetting herself utterly for once, they talked easily enough of a hundred different things.

At the top of the mountain with a little stretch of the big world lying clear cut before them, they sank under the shade of a huge pine tree.

“I’m dying to eat,” Ruth said frankly.

“Right-o,” Harry agreed. “Do we eat, Cap’n?”

It was thoughtlessly given—that title—and instantly Harry’s hand dropped on Jeanne’s in contrition.

“I’m so sorry. And here I’ve been doing my best to help you forget.”

“But I don’t want to forget.” Jeanne always met issues so squarely, Ruth thought, watching her sensitive face as she talked.

“I want to remember the captain and talk about him. I want to remember this war—and all the suffering of it. It’s the forgetters who are wrong.”

“Yes—you’re right,” Steve said quickly.

“But,” Jeanne went on, sitting forward in her earnestness, her hands clasped about her knees, “I want to remember—happily, that is the thing. To have sadness come and—and—leave you—richer.”

She plucked up a handful of pine-needles and sprinkled them through her fingers. “I can’t say it.”

“You’re saying it,” Harry cried. “We get you. S’good idea—but so was mine, about the lunch. Do we snatch a bite?”

“Oh, we mustn’t. They’d be mad,” Ruth said.

“Who’d be mad? Nobody in the whole bunch but that doll-baby. Carol’s all right,” Harry amended quickly at a look from Jeanne, “but she wants everything, and she wants it her own way in her own time. She’s probably fuming like an old hen because she’s not up here with us. And if she was here, she’d be afraid she was missing out on something the other bunch was having. Well, isn’t it true?” he ended, meeting Jeanne’s reproachful glance defiantly.

Jeanne laughed, but her eyes were troubled. “Yes, but ——”

“I know. You’re a good scout for a girl. That’s why the boys all like you. You don’t go around saying mean things about other girls behind their backs.”

“Not when you can talk about such glorious things as this that’s before our faces,” said Ruth with surprising tact.

“The thing that gets me is, that all this,”—she waved her hand to the view before them, “that looks so large, is such a wee little scrap of all that there is still to see. I want to travel,” she said suddenly, her eyes speaking for her for the first time since her arrival. “I want to see and know—and ——” she stopped suddenly. She had meant to say “and grow” —but it sounded just a little too serious.

“And what, Ruth?” Steve asked carelessly. But Ruth read his indifferent interest for mere politeness and closed up as suddenly as she had opened. If ever there was anyone really interested in her she knew she could talk, but not if he were simply lending a civil ear. The idea that it was up to her to interest people first had not yet occurred to her.

Halloos from below interrupted them, and in a few moments the rest of the party, hot

and breathless, joined them. Mr. Allen was playing chaperon again and in spite of his size and his age he was the readiest to build a fire and help with the getting of lunch. Most of it they had brought in boxes,—sandwiches, cake and coffee—but broiled steaks they must have or it could not be called a picnic.

After lunch the boys had a stone throwing contest while the girls were clearing up the debris. Then came a rollicking game of Duck on the Rock which nearly ended in tragedy. Jeanne, running furiously from Harry who was pursuing her, stumbled and fell rolling to the very edge of a cliff which dropped precipitately several hundred feet. There she lay, the upper part of her body half over, her toes and fingers digging into the dirt until Harry, close behind her, seized her by the ankles and drew her back. As she sank against him, white and wide-eyed, the earth over which she had been hanging crumbled and gave way, tumbling with a clatter of stones to the bottom.

Everyone was paralyzed into a silence that was broken finally by a chorus of gasps from the girls and brief exclamations from the boys. Jeanne recovered her composure more quickly

than anyone. With a little laugh she rose and curtsied to Harry.

“*Merci beaucoup*, Harry. It is strong fingers that you have. You have left the marks of all of them, I feel sure. Shall we start down?”

It was this gay courage of hers that was so admirable. Bee, pluckier than any of the other girls, recognized it and gave it due homage. On the trail down the mountain she managed to get next to Jeanne and give her arm a squeeze.

“You’re a wonder. I love you for not squealing. That’s twice to-day.”

“To be sporting goods, is not that what you say? That’s what I want to be,” Jeanne made quaint reply.

When they got home they found still more news awaiting them—of a happier nature this time. Bee, opening a letter from her mother, turned first very white then very red, then surprised them all by breaking into tears and laughter both at once.

“Wait—I’ll tell you,” she said. “It was so awful at first, now it’s so *good*. Jack was wounded—gassed,” she corrected herself, go-

ing back to her letter, "and he's been in a hospital a month and none of us knew it. But now he's better and they're sending him home. He's discharged from active service. No more fighting; think of that!"

The two girls might have been alone, so forgetful were they of the rest of the group. Bee's cheeks were scarlet, her eyes bright. Jeanne's face was pale, her lips steadied between two rows of even teeth, big tears brimming her brown eyes.

"And ——" Bee finally became aware of the other listeners, including them in her glance.

"He'll be getting here to America," she consulted her letter again, "soon—in a few weeks—and he wrote Mother that he'd probably stop off here on his way home."

Jeanne's long-drawn breath was unnoticed by all save Mrs. Stafford. With a quiet arm slipped about her daughter she asked a question that sobered the jubilation.

"Does your mother say how badly he was hurt? He may not be able to stand the racket here, you know. Much as we want him, he must do what is best."

“It’s his eyes, Auntie Bee,” Bee explained softly. “They’re no good—for use as a doctor or as a soldier. He has to wear glasses and be terribly careful and can’t read or write, but the doctors all say that time and rest will cure him absolutely.”

After that the evening was filled with talk of Jack and Jack’s coming. Bee held the center of the stage, holding the boys’ interest by graphic accounts of Jack’s adventures, and quite unconsciously painting her adored brother as a romantic figure who appealed to the listening girls—Carol and Ruth.

Jeanne slipped away unobserved and went to her room, and Bee, coming up at bedtime, found her sound asleep, her pillow wet with tears, one hand clutching the locket which was opened revealing Jack’s picture.

As Bee switched on the light, Jeanne, half awake, sat up in bed and stretched out her arms to Bee. Quickly the understanding little Westerner put the room in darkness again and kneeling down by the bed flung her arms about Jeanne. For a second there was silence, then a little laugh broke from them both.

“ We’re crying; aren’t we silly?” Jeanne whispered.

“ No, we’re sensible. You can’t always be sporting goods in the dark,” Bee retorted.

CHAPTER IX

THE BASEBALL GAME

IN ten days when Ted was able to be moved outdoors to the couch on the porch, Victor suggested a baseball game. It was to be played out in the field, the center of the horseshoe, the one open place visible from every cottage on the point. His suggestion was met with only half-hearted enthusiasm until he conceived the idea of the boys playing against the girls, the boys to be dressed in girls' clothes and bat and pitch left handed, while the girls were to wear knickers or bloomers.

The idea took at once. Ted, not to be left out of it, was persuaded to print a huge sign which read as follows:

The Ruff Necks of the Point
CHALLENGE
The Fair Damsels
to a
Baseball Game at the
Horseshoe Green
This Afternoon at 2:30
Boys will please wear skirts and girls kindly
put on trousers.

The girls immediately rushed to the green to see which of them could throw or catch or bat the best. After a rather hectic morning of screaming directions and convulsed laughter, Bee was elected captain and pitcher. She put Ruth on first base, one of the Allen girls on second, Carol on third and Jeanne was made catcher.

"But I can't pitch!" she cried dismally. "I shall ruin the game."

"'You are N G on the throw,'" Harry quoted an old saying of hers laughingly.

"Never mind, you can catch and nobody else can catch as well," said Bee. "If they'd let us wear skirts I'd put Carol there. She could stop the ball that way, but they won't and you're not afraid of them. Send grounders to Ruth on first; she'll get 'em. Or I'll run up and you pitch to me. Then I can get 'em to Ruth. That's best, I guess."

The lunch hour was a hilarious one, with the boys teasing the girls and putting up all sorts of bets, and the girls meeting them defiantly. The mothers were to make lemonade and serve it from Ted's porch. He himself was propped close to the rail, with field-glasses and a mega-

phone near by, for he was to be umpire. He wanted Mr. Allen to act as umpire but Mr. Allen was made to play, so Ted finally yielded.

At 2:30 the field was swarming with young people; girls trim in knickers and blouses, the boys galloping about in skirts. Harry had dressed up in a hat, gay with red and blue feathers. Where he had found it no one knew, but as the straw was nearly two feet in circumference and the feathers were suspiciously wet with dye, it was concluded he had decorated his own head-gear.

The Allen boys wore red flannel petticoats, high heeled white slippers and pink sunbonnets. Steve was gowned in a décolleté evening dress of Mrs. Stafford's, a black one that he trimmed with daisies "to brighten it up for this festive occasion." His great sunburned arms and huge wool-stockinged feet with sneakers on them protruding from this black lace creation made him a grotesque figure.

Victor, smaller and slighter than the other boys, looked almost charming in a simple little pink gingham dress with a high rounded neck, elbow sleeves, a pink belt and black slippers with pink socks. But it was Mr. Allen, great

red-faced Mr. Allen, with his hairy hands and thick neck, who convulsed the crowd. He was the last to appear, and the audience, sitting on the sloping ground below Ted's cottage, were clapping impatiently when a titter, then a shriek, then a roar rose from the youngsters among the spectators.

For the Allen boys, in their red flannel petticoats and sunbonnets, appeared pushing a dilapidated baby carriage which threatened to collapse at every bump in the ground, and in this carriage—or rather—*out* of it—reposed Mr. Allen, dressed as a baby. His feet, with knitted socks, fanned the air; a round white cap covered his head and he reared up in his big white nightgown to stare at the crowd, his face puckered in pretended fright, then he burst into a howl. The Allen boys hustled about, finally producing a bottle of milk and a pacifier, both of which they crammed into their large charge's mouth. Then they jammed him back among the pillows again and lumbered on their way.

The climax came, of course, when in trying to pull the old carriage up on the level of the field, it broke and the baby rolled out, breaking

his bottle of milk, yelling until his red face turned purple and his pink sacque burst its ribbons and split in two down the back. At that he leaped up, galloped out on the field, tied his nightgown up with a tape measure and proceeded to start the game.

Of course it was a farce. The boys were out for a good time and the girls' earnest efforts to shine were soon frustrated. No sooner did the Fair Damsels really make a good hit, or a safe run to a base, than one of the boys would start something ridiculous that entirely eclipsed the brilliancy of the girls. Steve, ripping his evening dress at every move, was the clown of the afternoon and had everyone shrieking in terror as it dropped from him bit by bit until he stood at last clad only in his bathing suit. Harry's hat, flopping off at a crucial moment, spoiled a home run, for he turned to gather his precious bonnet up tenderly into his arms and was put out. But it was Mr. Allen who kept the fun going most. No one could possibly have looked more grotesque than he did when he was in earnest, and when he finally flopped on the ground in the middle of the third inning and cried for his bottle till the Allen boys came

running with it and pillows and blankets, the wearied audience sighed in thankfulness for a moment's respite from side-splitting laughter.

The game consisted of five innings only, during which Bee had made two runs, Ruth one, Carol, fleet as a deer, three, two of which were home runs. Jeanne had distinguished herself by bravely catching all the balls Steve sent whizzing in to her, so that their score totalled six. What the boys scored was never accurately known for they did so much fooling and so little disputing that when the victory was finally given to the Fair Damsels with a lead of one point over the boys, they were the first to rush into a circle, stick their heads down, their shoulders up, and cheer for the "Dear Fair Gazelles."

After the game the two teams assembled on the broad verandah of Ted's cottage where lemonade and crackers were served. Bee and Jeanne, as usual, were busily hurrying about trying to serve the older people, while Harry and Steve trailed in their wake, trying to serve them. Carol, perched on the broad verandah rail near the reclining Ted, somehow gathered

about her the Allen boys and Vic. She wore brown knickers and a brown flannel shirt open at the neck with a brown cap pulled down over her fair hair. Her cheeks were flushed from the exercise of playing and her eyes sparkling, and it is not to be wondered at that glances were constantly turned on her.

Ruth, as usual, sat in a corner, talking to one of the older women. Her heavy hair, wet about her face, had lost whatever claim to curl it had ever possessed. The perspiration streamed down her face. Her middy blouse showed a big wet spot in the middle of the back; her bloomers were torn and her sneakers muddy. Why couldn't she play and get tumbled prettily? As Carol did? And Jeanne? And Bee? Jeanne looked like an apple blossom. Her waist was white;—but still white, Ruth noticed resentfully—her hair, though falling about her shoulders, clung in ringlets and looked prettier than ever.

Bee was torn and muddy but she retained a freshness of color, a fluffiness of hair that gave her an appearance of order and cleanliness.

Ruth rose, a sudden lump filling her throat. Everything was so constantly disappointing.

She was so tired of being on the outside of things. She guessed she'd go home—sneak away.

No one saw her. She dropped her feet over the railing, and when laughter broke out afresh over some prank of Mr. Allen's, she jumped to the ground, scurried to the rear of the house and started on a run back to their cottage. Tears welled up as she hurried along the path, so that she was unaware of an approaching figure until she ran plump into his arms.

"Oh! Oh!" she cried, flinging her head back to stare through a mist of tears at a big man with kind eyes looking down at her. They were the kindest eyes she had ever seen, she thought, and the bluest. "Excuse me," she ended in confusion, and then she tried to break away from his strong hands, for fresh tears at the misery of being so seen by a stranger—and a man—threatened.

"Nothing to excuse," he assured her calmly, still keeping his hold on her arm but turning with her to walk by her side. "Now tell me the trouble," he said in an authoritative way. "Maybe I can help. I've helped ladies in distress before."

Ruth blinked, gulped, dashed at the tears with her hands, then laughed.

“I’m sure you have. You seem to know how to do it. I feel better already.”

It was a natural little speech and tumbled out unwittingly.

“That’s better.” His hand patted her arm in a big brotherly way. “Are you going anywhere in particular? If not, let’s sit here on this big flat rock and talk. You’ll meet me sooner or later—I’m visiting here—so we may as well consider ourselves properly introduced.”

“I’m Ruth Winfield.” As she spoke she dropped on the rock and looked up at the big man standing beside her. “And I don’t know why I should pour my troubles and my tears all over you, but I seem to be going to do it.”

“Troubles and tears are both better for an airing.” He began to smoke, deliberately giving the girl before him time to regain her composure. Then he flung himself on the ground at her feet, his face half turned from hers. “Aren’t you having a good time here?” he asked in a matter-of-fact way.

"No." It burst from her in a bitterness of passion that rather shocked her companion, but he kept on smoking, his head still averted.

"Why not?"

"Because—oh—because, I'm fat and ugly and my clothes are all wrong and ——"

"You think the boys don't like you?"

Ruth nodded.

"They like Carol and Jeanne best, and they all like Bee —— Who are you anyway?" Ruth demanded suddenly. "And whom are you visiting? Why should I be talking to you like this? Oh, I wouldn't if I weren't sure I'd never see you again!"

"Now see here." He sat up and turned to face Ruth. "I believe that people come into each other's lives for a reason every time. My meeting you isn't accidental. Your wanting to talk to me, personally, isn't a thing of chance. It's been *meant*. If I can help you, I want to. Perhaps you can help me too. I don't know how, or when. People are intended to give to each other something of themselves. You've just started to show me the real you that you've kept tucked away from everybody else all summer. Don't get scared and scuttle

away, now;" he paused, then added, slowly, "I'm Tom Kelly."

During the first of his speech Ruth sat staring in dumb amazement at him, her lovely gray eyes widening and darkening in the wonder and joy of being talked to like that. Could it be the beginning of a dream come true? In his friendliness he was utterly unaware of the stir he was waking in the quiet girl before him, the turmoil and breathlessness that seized her.

"It's been *meant*." The words echoed in her heart, touching her dream world with a radiance and sparkle and glow when before it had been drab and dull. Then when he told her his name, the fire in her face died, the shock of the disclosure turned her white and still, then the slow red crept to her cheeks. She jumped up.

"I hate you!" she cried in a low fierce voice. And she sped on down the path to the cottage.

CHAPTER X

RUTH COMES OUT OF HER SHELL

TOM KELLY's coming had been planned as a surprise. He had written to Mrs. Stafford as soon as he had reached America again and told her it would be almost a month before he would be assigned to another ship. He would like very much to accept the invitation she had offered him months before and come up to Lake Sunnapine for part of his leave of absence.

Mrs. Stafford, of course, wrote him a royal welcome. He could have the other downstairs bedroom across the living-room from Steve and Harry. She had slipped away from the baseball game to meet his train, and on coming back to the cottage with him, had found unexpected callers stopping on the way through the mountains of Vermont by automobile. So she had sent Tom over to Ted's, regretting her inability to share in the surprise of the girls.

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Tom, of course, had heard about all the girls through Jeanne's letters and it was an easy guess that the tear-stained, woebegone baseball player running home was Ruth.

The same big-hearted impulsiveness that had drawn Jeanne's story from her a year or more ago, had prompted him to hold out the warm hand of friendship to this girl too. Ruth responded as Jeanne had, feeling the gentleness under his strength, seeing sympathy in his blue eyes. For Tom had known deprivation, suffering and loneliness, and each had contributed to his share of understanding.

After she had abruptly left him he rose and went on down the path toward the sound of laughter and voices he heard in the distance. Ruth, meanwhile, flew home, and, hearing voices on the verandah, she slipped in the back door and up to her own room.

Tom Kelly! It seemed to her the cruelest blow that had yet fallen that Tom should have had his first glimpse of her in that way. Jeanne had so often spoken of him, more often than she had of Jack, about whom she kept a curious reserve, speaking, when she did briefly, with a far-away look in her eyes. But Tom was a

familiar figure to Ruth and a romantic one. She had pictured him so often, red hair, blue eyes, frank wide smile and winning friendliness, and each time her imagination had dwelt on him she had fancied meeting him.

A hundred different ways she had conceived their introduction, and always, of course, Ruth was to be beautiful and brilliant, winning for herself from him an interest as great as Dr. Jack's in Jeanne.

And now—now—to have it happen this way. When she was dirty and swollen with tears and unhappy. What a fool she had been to talk. *Why* had she? If she had only known who he was! He should have told her, instantly, as she did him. He hadn't been fair. If she had known she could have bluffed. Now he knew all her shame and misery and ache and loneliness, and he must despise her. At any rate, she despised him. Romantic! He wasn't romantic at all. He was fresh and inquisitive. And for all the rest of his stay here she'd keep away from him. He could talk with Jeanne or Carol or Bee, but not another word would he ever get out of her.

She wanted to lie in her bed and cry for the

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rest of the day, but Ruth had her pride and having decided on her course of action she rose to begin it. She took a hasty swim in the lake, washed her hair while she was in, then dried it in the sun on the boat house verandah.

Back in her room she picked out her clothes that she would wear that night with great care.

They were to go over to the park, it had been decided on Ted's verandah, so Ruth chose a pleated white skirt, her deep yellow sweater, white strap pumps and silk stockings. Her hair, straight enough most of the time, curled the tiniest bit after a shampoo, so she did not have to bother with curlers. As she was putting on her net, her cheeks scarlet from hurrying, she heard the others come trooping home.

When Carol came up Ruth was sitting by the window, deliberately polishing her finger nails.

"My *dear*," Carol cried before she was fairly in the room. "What do you think? Tom Kelly has come!"

"Yes, I know," Ruth made answer without looking up. "I met him on my way home."

"Oh, did you? Isn't he stunning? Honestly, I never saw such a good-looking man in

all my life. His whole face just twinkles, and his lovely red hair is so curly and his eyes are so blue—and he's so big. Isn't he huge? He loves dancing, he says."

All this time Carol was divesting herself of her knickers and getting into her bathing suit.

"Of course he looks ridiculous in that sailor suit and those floppy trousers and that cap perched on his head, but he says ——"

With a little shock of surprise at herself Ruth realized she hadn't even noticed his clothes. She might have been faintly suspicious if she had. What a fool! What a—she polished harder.

"—says he'll wear white ones to-night. We're all going in swimming now. Coming down? What did you come home so early for?" At last Carol's thoughts centered on Ruth.

"I was too hot and wet to be comfortable."

"Well, you look cool as a cucumber now, and about as delicious. Why don't you rave too? Didn't you love him?"

"No, I didn't. I didn't like him at all."

"Oh, la, la," Carol cried gaily. "Sour ball!"

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The gay laughter of the crowd came up to Ruth sitting determinedly alone in her room, polishing — polishing — polishing. But she would not go down. She would never, not for one instant, be alone with Tom Kelly again while he was here. He might have caught her off guard once, but never again.

So she waited until Carol was ready, Carol who put on a black dress and coiled her hair up to-night and looked three years older than any of the rest of them. She could have passed for twenty, with her slim white throat and fair head rising above a dainty frilled collar at the rounded neck of her dress. One great gold flower embroidered on the low belt line of her skirt was the only color she wore except for the gold lining in the black cape. Ruth, snapping the one hook at her back, was suddenly shaken with envy. No matter what her own best appearance was, it was never half as good as any of the other three girls.

But she followed Carol down-stairs humming a little song with a brave air of indifference, and when Mrs. Stafford started to introduce Tom she gave a careless nod and said:

"Oh, we met earlier. I showed him the way over to Ted's."

Then she went to the piano and began playing until everyone appeared for supper. Tom came and stood close by the piano resting one arm on its top, which was slightly upsetting to Ruth's plan of utter indifference, but she kept her eyes down and when Carol summoned him to her side and kept him there, Ruth, playing on, thought bitterly:

"Of course, that's what always happens. But I'm *glad*."

Jeanne was all in white. Tom sat beside her at the table with eyes for no one else. Ruth, her first brave effort to be gay dying under neglect, watched them with a dull pain in her heart. Tom teased Jeanne and complimented her all in a breath and Jeanne, her great brown eyes sparkling, her face lovely in her happiness to see her old friend, laid her tiny white hand on his arm and went beside him down to the dock where the big steamer was to stop.

Ruth waited for Mrs. Stafford. Carol was with Harry, Bee with Steve. On board the boat, Ruth found herself in the middle of the group of chaperones, talking to be sure, and

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apparently absorbed in explaining the stitch in her yellow sweater to Mrs. Allen, but she never for a moment was unaware of anything that was going on among the young people. She felt Tom's look rest on her for an instant, then knew he and Jeanne had disappeared forward. Carol's voice, sweet and tiny like a trickle of sand, led half a dozen others in singing some of the popular airs. One, a favorite, silly though it was—filled in every pause.

“ I'm her he
She's my she
I love her, she loves me,
She's as dumb as she can be,
But she's not too dumb for me ——”

and on to the ridiculous end.

“ Be my she to-night, Carol? ” she heard Harry ask.

“ Only part of the time, ” Carol made answer. Ted, of course, was not there, and Victor had not come. Ruth foresaw a dreadful evening with herself as the extra girl, and truly it started off that way. The Allen boys each danced with their cousins, Tom with

Jeanne, Harry and Carol, Steve with Bee. Ruth's eyes dropped and she tried her best not to look expectant or anxious when the dance was over and everyone was standing about waiting for the music to begin again. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Jeanne go off with Harry, Steve with Carol—would Tom take Bee or her? Would he never stop talking to Mrs. Allen? The music was going and it was so good, and to miss a bit of it—if she was to dance with Tom—— Oh! he was coming, laughing, his eyes on Bee. Ruth's hurt was almost physical. She felt so sick that for a moment the lights wavered and she had to stare steadily, till they stopped their silly bobbing about. She didn't care. Why should she? She hated him anyway and wasn't going to say a word. It was simply that she couldn't bear to sit out again while all the others danced, and have everyone see her.

Past Bee, with a smile and a low word. Straight to Ruth.

“ Mine? ”

Ruth's eyes spoke for her, a dumb thanks, a great swelling joy, a terrific embarrassment and shame. She was in his arms, dancing as

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she knew she had never danced before, listening to his voice, a pleasant rumble, humming the tune to break an awkward silence.

During the first pause as he stood clapping he gave her a quick glance.

“Don’t want to talk?”

“Not—when I’m dancing,” she made answer.

“Later?”

Ruth nodded, angry at her own helplessness to resist him. Yet too hungry for just such attention as this to refuse. Nothing more was said. Ruth, suiting her step to his, found him a beautiful dancer, sure of himself with a strong lead and sense of rhythm. Ruth had that, too, but she knew she was not as pliable as any of the other three girls and with the less experienced younger boys she had stumbled and faltered. To-night, however, there was magic in her feet. She felt as light as thistle-down and when the dance ended and Tom led her off into the darkness under the trees, it seemed almost natural to have him say:

“You’re a wonderful dancer.”

But her tongue was tied, as it always had been, and all of a sudden she dreaded the ordeal

before her. She stopped suddenly, pulling her arm from his grasp.

“Let's go back—to the others.”

“Why?”

“Because—there's nothing to say.”

“I have lots to say. Want to hear it?”

Ruth found herself laughing, suddenly at ease, and they made for a chair swing in the near distance. It was his directness, his sincerity that broke down her restraint and when, opposite her in the swing, he leaned forward at once and with his right hand extended said:

“I want to be friends with you. Won't you let me?”

Ruth swallowed once quickly, then slipped her hand in his and answered simply:

“I'd love it.”

Their hands gripped hard, then fell apart and Ruth laughed a little nervously.

“How do we begin? This is so different from what I had planned.”

“I know. You were going to freeze me out. Why, Ruth? Just because I caught you in tears? Don't you see that gave us a head start over all the others? I saw the real you—didn't have to wait for introductions and then go

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through the long and painful business of digging you out. What is there to be ashamed of? Or sorry about?"

So Ruth tried to tell him how all her life she had wanted boys' companionship and how all her life she had never had it; how lonely she was; how hard, terribly hard it was to be the extra girl and sit with the chaperones. How she dreamed that this summer she might meet someone who would like her as he—Tom—liked Jeanne. Enough to want to dance with her first and last.

It was a short confession but brave, revealing the bleakness of Ruth's life and the hunger of her heart, and when she suddenly stopped with a gulp, Tom reached forward and found her hand.

"Now I'll tell you what we're going to do while I'm up here. Know that song?" and he began:

" I'm her he,
She's my she ——

"All right. I'm your he, and you're my she, and we're going to have the time of our lives."

"Because you're *sorry* for me!" Ruth burst out.

"I am—yes," Tom made honest answer, "but that's not all the reason. I *like* you. I *like* you," he repeated, "and I hate to see a girl as fine as you are handing herself such a raw deal."

At Ruth's stare of amazement Tom went on:

"This afternoon, in spite of your tears you were genuine. You said what you thought and felt, and you showed a streak of humor too. To-night when you came down-stairs you looked stunning, but you sat like a lump on a log. I came over to the piano. Did you look up or smile a welcome? You did not. Carol called me. Do you think I'd have left you if you had given a sign you wanted me to stay? Give out a little of the warmth that's there. You're lonely, Ruth, but you're proud and cold in your loneliness. If you'd love more and laugh more you wouldn't be on the outside edge long. Why, you're a peach of a sport ——"

"Oh, do you really think so?"

"I know it. But you hide yourself so. If you make a mistake, laugh. The crowd'll

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laugh with you, not at you. Do you see what I mean?"

"I—I think so."

"If you love chocolate sundaes, say so. If you hate spiders, say so. Say something ——"

"That's it. That's always been my trouble. Everything I start to say sounds so silly."

"It isn't, if it's what you're thinking and feeling at the moment. It isn't, because it's you. And everybody wants to know you, just as you want to know other people. Get that?"

"I—I believe I do."

"There goes the music again and I have to go back because I asked Bee for it."

Ruth rose instantly.

"Surely," she said politely, but Tom put out a hand and laid it on her shoulder.

"Glad you came here?"

Ruth nodded.

"Glad we talked?"

Ruth nodded again.

"Then why in the name of time don't you say so, instead of giving me a stiff 'Surely,' as though nothing had been said and no progress had been made. See what I mean?"

Ruth nodded again. Tom laughed, tucked

her hand under his arm and they started back for the pavilion. Once under the cover of the trees Ruth gave his big arm a tiny squeeze.

"Oh, I do like you and I am much obliged for the scolding."

"That's it. That's fine. That's *you* talking. Now give me some more. If you practise enough on me, by and by you'll be able to give it to the other boys. Then all will be rosy and happy and I shall be lost in the crowd that yaps at your heels for a smile."

"No, you won't, Tom Kelly," Ruth told him, and though her eyes were laughing, her voice was serious. "You're my he, you know," she ended, suddenly audacious.



"YOU'RE MY HE YOU KNOW," SHE ENDED

CHAPTER XI

RUTH LOSES A FRIEND

RUTH found Steve waiting for her when she got back and with a sense of elation which seemed to put her heart on tiptoe, she smiled up at him as they glided off together. A look of surprise showed in his eyes for a moment, then he smiled back.

“Hello,” Ruth said impulsively.

“Hello, yourself. What’s the matter?”

“Nothing,” she told him. “Absolutely nothing; everything is righter than it’s ever been, and it’s all because of Tom Kelly.”

She was talking now, talking fast, as thoughts came to her, and her realization of Steve’s interest enabled her to go on. He asked her what she meant and she told him.

“I’ve always wanted to pal around with boys the way Bee does. Not the way Carol does. I couldn’t play her way, flirting and laughing and saying nothing, but I could be

like Bee, I thought, only I didn't know how. Well, Tom's showing me how, that's all."

"I always thought you had a lot more to say than you said," Steve said.

"Did you really? Well," it was queer, she thought, how easy it was to make revelations once you started, "I've simply ached to talk to you, Steve, and you never gave me any help."

"I'm awfully sorry," he told her in honest apology. "It's hard for me, too, you know. I like to talk about sports and college and boy things that most girls aren't interested in."

"But I *am*; that's just what I like to talk about."

Their tongues went as fast as their feet and when their feet got tangled, Ruth, instead of becoming confused and apologizing, laughed gaily and told him it was all his fault. It was an adventure for her, this first entering into a girl's domain, and she thrilled to the excitement of it. Steve left her with regret, assuring her he'd be back again soon, and Ruth, nodding a happy bow to him, drifted off with Harry in an unconcern that surprised herself.

Harry was easy. He always had been the

easiest one of them all to talk to. He carried on such a string of nonsense himself that no one ever had to make an effort. The difference lay in the fact that to-night Ruth enjoyed it and met him half-way, while before her laughter had been constrained and self-conscious.

Tom was back looking for her soon after that, and they danced together quite without speech. Then they went up to the swing again and Tom gave her more encouragement and more advice that moved Ruth to both tears and laughter. They forgot the time, and the next dance was well under way before Tom sprang to his feet in dismay.

“Oh, I’m terribly sorry. I have this with Carol. It’s the first one I’ve been able to get.”

They hurried back to the pavilion to find Carol sitting by the chaperones. It was her first experience as a wall flower and she was furious. Her face was dead white, her eyes blazing when Tom approached her with his apology.

Without a word she rose and went off with him but her glance at Ruth was filled with hate. Ruth missed it and dropped down beside Mrs.

Stafford quite unmindful of the fact that she was the extra girl again.

Tom and Carol did not reappear after the dance, and when the musicians climbed down from their lofty platform hung from the ceiling in the center of the room and announced a half hour's intermission, all the young people went down for ice-cream. Still Carol and Tom did not appear, and Steve, walking along by Ruth, said in a low voice:

"She's getting her hooks on him—or trying to."

"What do you mean?" Ruth asked.

"Oh, the boys all fall for Carol—at first."

"Don't they like her now?"

"Not as well as they did in the beginning."

"Why not?"

"Well," Steve hunted for words—"she hasn't got what Jeanne and Bee and you have—reserve, I guess you call it. She's—familiar. That's all."

Carol and Tom appeared before they had quite finished their refreshments and joined them at the two tables they had just put together.

Carol refused anything to eat but when Tom

started to light a cigarette, she daringly leaned over and nipped it out of his mouth.

"Thanks," she said coolly, tapping it daintily. "I'm dying for one. Light, please."

It was the first time she had openly done this and though everyone there knew she smoked in secret, it came as a surprise to them all. She leaned back in her chair and met Tom's steady look with a bravado that she did not feel, for in his level gaze was a something she did not like and was not accustomed to seeing.

"You will get no light from me," said Tom.

"Shocked?" she asked with a pretended carelessness.

"Oh, no. Only—sorry to see you spoil a lovely picture. It doesn't fit in, somehow, that thing, with the loveliness of your face and person."

"Charming, Mr. Kelly," Carol said lightly, but there was a flash in her eyes. "I don't quite get you."

"Why, it's just like a black streak on a perfect painting, that's all. It doesn't go. It spoils it all. I can't say it any better than that."

The rest of the people had been listening, wondering how Carol would meet the honest criticism that she had called down on herself. What she did was to laugh and say with mock seriousness:

“I’m sorry my efforts to please you have failed. It’s the disappointment of my life.” Then she turned her back on Tom and devoted herself to Harry. As soon as the music started again up on the hill she jumped up and touching Harry on the shoulder led him back to the pavilion.

It was the first time Carol’s audacity had not called forth admiration from a new boy. But she had reckoned without remembering that Tom was more man than boy, more experienced than anyone else she had ever met, therefore better able to make fair judgments and comparisons. He was neither shocked, surprised nor admiring. While granting her right to smoke his manner indicated that in so doing something intrinsically precious left her, a something that spoiled the picture she made and the idea he liked to have about her. They danced together again and words flashed between them, which left Tom cooler and blunter

than ever, and tended to increase Carol's recklessness.

She had failed utterly in spite of her becoming black dress and coiled hair to make a hit with Jeanne's sailor friend and when she saw Ruth returning for the third time with him from the darkness of the trees her jealousy found vent in a hissed little speech that reached them both.

"Captivated Monsieur Kelly, haven't you? Wonder if he'd like you so well if he knew you'd smoked in private a few times yourself?"

Ruth's face went white in her sudden anger and scorn. Then the dull red surged up and she turned her great gray eyes on Tom.

"Oh, she's told me all about that," he said easily. "Told me she didn't like it and wasn't going to do it any more."

"Clever of her." Carol's words cut Ruth to the quick, for there was not a streak of meanness in her make-up and the one bright spot in her life that summer had been her belief that a girl of Carol's charm and beauty had genuinely liked her, had given her a real friend-

ship. Her hurt lay in her eyes that she again lifted to Tom.

“ Well, you see,” Tom drawled slowly, “ we settled it the first dance, didn’t we, Ruth, that

“ I’m her he
She’s my she ——”

He caught her arm and led her to the dance floor singing:

“ I love her—
She loves me.”

Carol, hearing them, clenched her teeth and sat down again, the extra girl for the second time that evening.

“ She’s as dumb as she can be,” Ruth carried on the verse, laughing up at him.

“ But she’s not too dumb for me,” he finished. “ I was going to ask her for this dance, but not after that. Nope. Not after that. She’s got a lot to learn, that kid.”

“ You going to teach her?” Ruth inquired slyly, determined not to let thoughts of Carol spoil her pleasure to-night anyway.

He grinned down at her.

“ You’re getting a little too good with your

swift repartee," he told her. "No, I think one pupil at a time is all I can manage."

"Don't teach me all you know in one evening, will you?" Ruth begged. "Make it last."

"I'll say you're learning fast," Tom remarked, looking down at her in surprise. "My guess is that you'll be telling me things before my vacation is over."

On the way to the boat that night Tom walked between Jeanne and Ruth. Back in the park the lights were tiny golden balls. Faint music drifted through the darkness to their ears. Out in the open myriads of stars covered the sky and the water kissed the rocky shore tenderly. Tom stopped suddenly.

"This is simply great," he said solemnly, "and I'm darned lucky to have two such girls as you are for friends."

But Ruth, walking silently by his side, with his big hand giving her arm an understanding squeeze once in a while, knew that she was the lucky one because for her a dear dream—the most precious she had ever had—was beginning to come true.

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Carol's pique was not a passing affair. She nursed it until it grew into a life-size jealousy, and Ruth, rooming with her, found the intimacy almost unbearable. Carol said as little as possible in their privacy together but when she did speak, her words were barbed with venom. Over and over again she hurt Ruth with her insinuations until the slow color would surge up into Ruth's cheeks and she would walk out, closing the door very silently behind her, her eyes blazing fires in their deep gray depths.

In the crowd they could keep apart and nothing was noticed by the others except that Carol, in her failure to win Tom's attention and interest, had become shriller of voice, more reckless of manner and impudent in tone. Her attitude toward Mrs. Stafford bordered on insulting—a slight return of the imperious overbearing way with which she had treated M'amselle. Mrs. Stafford appeared not to notice it until one time when Carol's rudeness was too great to be overlooked. It was the morning that a brief letter came from Jack saying he was in America and would travel up from New York as soon as he was able in a

hydroplane with a friend of his who was in the air service of the United States.

“ Oh,” Bee cried at once with enthusiasm, “ do you suppose we could all have a ride in it? ”

“ Ask Jack. Possibly he could arrange it,” Mrs. Stafford suggested.

“ I’m going to have a ride, anyway, if nobody else does,” Carol stated with a tossing of her head that meant business.

“ How will you manage it? ” Tom inquired. Carol’s smile was disdainful.

“ Oh, there are so many ways to smuggle a ride,” she said airily. “ Jeanne knows some of them.”

“ Carol,” Mrs. Stafford said quietly, “ I must forbid you to take a ride in the hydroplane unless you have the willingness of Mr. Pryce, who is driving it, and my consent at the time.”

A dangerous flash came into Carol’s eyes. The forbidding of a thing always roused her temper. She rose and moved toward the door.

“ Forbid all you want,” she muttered, “ it won’t do any good.”

“ Carol.”

Some quality in Mrs. Stafford's voice electrified the company and held Carol an unwilling listener at the doorway.

"Look at me, Carol."

Carol turned an angry face toward her aunt who had not moved but whose very repression lent force to her words. "If you speak to me like that again while you are under my roof, I shall take it into my hands to engage a companion for you who will accompany you home at once."

"What's gotten into her?" Tom asked Ruth later and Ruth told him frankly:

"She's jealous. You give your time and attention to all of us except her. She's not used to it. And she ——"

Then Ruth, out of a sore, bruised heart told him of Carol's meanness to her. She had not spoken of it to Jeanne or Bee. It had seemed a shame to pile any more troubles on Jeanne who took the unhappiness of her guests so greatly to heart, and Ruth had been afraid if she confided in Bee that she would tell Jeanne.

"It's simply that I don't know what to do," she ended to Tom. "I don't know how to act. Whether to say nothing or scratch back at her."

“That never does any good,” Tom said. “I guess you’ll have to hold on to yourself, Ruth. It’s stiff business, but—don’t you see? Whoever has the biggest spirit has to show it. She’ll learn her lesson some time. You’ll have to wait until she does.”

“When will she, I wonder? Who’s going to teach her?”

“Not I. That’s certain. She won’t take anything from me now.”

“The thing that hurts so,” Ruth said in a low voice, “oh, it isn’t what she says, but it’s because it’s she saying it. We were friends, you see, at least I thought we were.”

Tom nodded.

“And—and—friendship means something. Tom, you know it does. You can’t blow hot and blow cold, be nice and be horrid, and expect people to keep on counting on you, *liking* you. Why, I feel so different about Carol.” She stopped suddenly. “I’d die of loneliness if it weren’t for you, Tom Kelly,” she told him, and there was a hint of tears in her eyes.

“You’re missing the chance of a lifetime,” he told her in his matter-of-fact way.

“What do you mean?”

"This is your chance to get closer to Jeanne and Bee. Don't you see it? You've been so taken up with Carol, have given her your interest and sympathy so that you've overlooked the other two. And they're each worth a heap more than Carol."

"I know it. But"—a little of the old bitterness crept into her voice, "they don't need me."

"No, they don't need you," Tom said honestly, his blue eyes meeting her gray ones steadily. "But they *want* you. They told me so," he added deliberately.

CHAPTER XII

THE REGATTA

JEANNE saw, even before Tom told her, how things were going between Carol and Ruth, for there soon developed a chilly politeness that was obvious to the most blind. And Jeanne, trying her best to understand it, came about as near to the truth as Carol, who not thinking, merely feeling, did herself. Carol, it must be, was not possessed of a large enough soul to be glad that her efforts to help Ruth make herself attractive had at last won their reward. Theoretically she wanted Ruth to enjoy herself, but practically she, Carol, must enjoy herself first and more. Up until Tom's coming she had, but Tom's frank preference for Ruth's society to hers, coupled with his outspokenness to her, had roused in her jealousy as well as a desire for revenge. There was also the vague consciousness that her first charm had worn off for the other boys. Her manner, in the beginning interesting because audacious, had become

an old story, and was tinged with imperiousness now, an imperiousness that had been endured by M'amselle, but was not to be brooked by persons as young as herself.

Carol, these days, was the odd girl in the house, for Harry invariably was to be found by Jeanne's side, and Steve with Bee. With Ted still laid up and Victor indifferent as he had always been, the future did not look very promising to a girl of Carol's temperament. She took out her spite on Ruth.

All this Jeanne dimly realized, and it prompted her to hold out a warm hand to Ruth, to draw her in with Bee and herself in their jokes and confidences—the little ways that mean companionship. Ruth responded eagerly and was to be found more often dressing in their room than in her own, consulting them about the clothes she should wear instead of Carol; giving them shyly, bit by bit, the secret thoughts that Carol had never had, because Ruth had never surely felt sympathy or trustworthiness in Carol.

“I never saw such a change in a girl in my life,” Bee said to Jeanne one day of Ruth. “She's—she's just come alive.”

“Isn’t it wonderful?” Jeanne agreed. “It is making me so happy. And Tom’s to be thanked for it. He dug her out first.”

“Yes, he did,” Bee agreed, “and it is peachy of him. He’s like that.”

“Yes,” Jeanne agreed, “he’s just like that.” She laughed a little and went on, “Isn’t it too bad, that having at last got Ruth’s happiness fixed, Carol’s is all mixed up?” Her face puckered into a frown. “She had such a good time at first and now ——”

“Now what?” Ruth demanded, opening the door.

“Now it’s time to go swimming. You’ve got to practise your swan dive, Ruth, or Carol will beat you at it.”

Bee was referring to the Regatta.

Under the leadership of Mr. Allen, the event had taken on rather large proportions. All the cottage owners with boats were induced to decorate and enter theirs in a grand parade. This was scheduled first. There were to be canoe races for older boys and girls, rowboat races for younger boys and girls, tub races, swimming races, diving contests, greased pole contests and tilting contests. The Regatta

was set for the last Saturday in July and that was only a few days off.

Carol and Ruth were entered in the short dash, the one quarter mile swim and the diving contest. They were each of them asked to steady canoes during the tilting contest. Tom had asked Jeanne to paddle for him. Steve had chosen Ruth as his paddler and Harry had asked Bee. The Allen girls were paddling for their cousins and Vic finally asked Carol who tossed her head airily and said she'd think about it.

People from cottages all over the lake had been interested in the affair and it promised to be the biggest excitement of the season.

Friday was a dull gray day threatening rain for Saturday, but fortunately a heavy thunderstorm during the night cleared the air so that the day dawned as it should,—clear, bright and cool with just enough wind to make waves that would guarantee excitement during the tilting contest.

During the morning everyone was busy decorating the boats. Carol and the twins were to trim the canoe; the rest of Jeanne's house party had charge of the launch. When

they finally took their place in line hidden behind a curve of the shore from the spectators who thronged on the beach, they all realized they hadn't a ghost of a chance of winning even honorable mention for their decorations. They had all been more interested in other events and had, as a consequence, trimmed their boat in the easiest and quickest way, without much thought. When the Allens' launch, fixed like a tropical garden with oranges hung in trees, real squirrels clambering about in the branches, and a fountain spraying in the midst of the loveliness, passed by the judges' stand, it was known at once that they would get the prize.

The twins, Harry and Steve, won first prize in the boys' canoe race and Ted, on crutches now, reclining in an invalid chair, slapped them on the back as they passed, remarking:

"If you had the Van Tyne twins to buck, it's dollars to doughnuts that prize paddle wouldn't be in your hands." He eyed it enviously.

"Easy to talk," laughed Harry. But Ted had been right. He and Victor had paddled together for years. Harry and Steve had only

begun this summer and had won by sheer strength of endurance. It had been hard to let the laurels go to strangers without being able to lift a finger to keep them. But Vic had refused to paddle with anyone other than his brother.

Two girls from Neshobe Beach, a few miles up the lake, beat Ruth and Bee in the girls' canoe race. The tub races, rowboat races and greased pole contests were for younger children. Before the diving and swimming contest came the tilting contest. Carol had finally consented to paddle for Victor. She and Vic were called first to struggle against Jeanne and Tom. It is probable that Carol was more skillful with the paddle than Jeanne. To offset this it was evident that Tom was steadier on his feet, and quicker to thrust the long padded pole at Vic. The fight was exciting but excitement steeled Carol's nerves, while it made Jeanne a bit hilarious. At any rate, there flashed up in Carol a feeling of hatred for this man who had humiliated her by his indifference and she coolly determined to help Vic douse him. Her eye never missed a move, her body was lightning in its movements to help right

and steady her canoe, and after an exciting three minutes, Tom with a laugh and Jeanne with a shriek fell into the water.

This thrilled Carol. She waited eagerly for Steve and Ruth to upset Harry and Bee, then with a feeling of confidence, she and Vic came at Ruth's canoe where Steve was standing coolly waiting for them.

Carol was as determined to spill Ruth as she had been to spill Tom, but the match was more than even this time. Ruth was as good a paddler as she, and Steve infinitely more self-possessed than Vic. They edged and circled, lunged, parried and tilted for five minutes. Finally a slight disturbance on shore distracted Carol for a second. In that moment Steve had thrust, Vic had caught the wadded pole fairly in his shoulder and had recovered, but Carol, unprepared, did not dig her paddle into the water. Over they went.

It was utterly unimportant except that Carol was chagrined. She had wanted to beat Ruth and she had failed. There were still the swimming and diving contests, however, and she was determined to shine in one or both events.

There were other entries, of course, for the girls' swimming races, but it was at once clear that Ruth and Carol were by far the best swimmers. The short dash came first. There were eight entries. Tom was one of the judges with Mr. Allen. Carol's foot slipped as she dove off the float,—an accident that might have happened to anyone,—and her chances for beating Ruth here were spoiled. She came in a close second but her face as she rose from the water was clouded with disappointment. This had been the one event she had been sure of. For Ruth, though stronger, and possessing more endurance and a more even speed in a long race, could not cut through the water in a dash as Carol could. Carol, resting after the event, while the boys vied with each other, vowed with clenched teeth that she would beat Ruth in the quarter mile, anyhow.

"Hard luck, Carol," Ruth said. "You should have won that."

"Oh, I'll beat you yet," Carol cried in a shrill voice. "Watch me."

Tom heard her and glanced at her curiously. She was taking it seriously—this fun. As though winning were in some way a revenge.

The same eight girls entered for the quarter mile race. Tom and Mr. Allen were again judges. Tom, in a boat, saw Ruth and Carol pull easily away from the other six and leave them far behind. They were both swimming splendidly and seemed to be neck and neck. No—three-quarters of the way across, Ruth was gaining a little, ever so slightly; her strong, steady, single overhand stroke pulled her past Carol. She was not looking—her back was turned to Carol, her eyes on Tom in the boat, the goal past which she must go. She could not see what Tom saw.

Ruth had gained twice the length of her body when Carol, turning on her other side, saw how far ahead she was; instantly she put her face in the water, and started her Australian crawl. She would, she knew, overtake Ruth, but she would lose terribly her breath control and her strength. But they were too near the goal now for her not to speed up.

On she splashed, heading, oddly enough, straight for Ruth. The diagonal course would take longer. Had she, with her face under water, lost her sense of direction, Tom wondered? She was gaining, was so close to Ruth

now that her splashing caught Ruth's ears. She realized that Carol was making a heart-breaking effort to outdistance her. Carol was nearly even with her now and still carrying on.

Suddenly Tom saw Carol lift her face out of the water, and shake her head, gasping for air. For the briefest second the two girls' eyes met, then Carol's face went down again; she turned her course as though suddenly realizing she was interfering—getting in Ruth's way. But as she struck out again Tom saw Ruth flounder, she missed a stroke, recovered, then with a glance of scorn at Carol's back, she fought hard to regain what that moment's pause had cost her. It was a splendid finish, the girls coming in so close that the audience could not be sure which had won.

But Ruth knew, and Carol knew, that she had pulled past Tom's boat about six inches ahead, and Ruth, her eyes downcast, Carol, her face lifted expectantly, waited for Tom's decision.

"Ruth Winfield wins the quarter mile!" Tom announced to the people on shore through his megaphone. Then his cool blue eyes met

Carol's hot ones, passed from her to Ruth and both girls knew Tom had seen Carol's deliberate kick that had spoiled Ruth's stroke.

Carol, pleading exhaustion after the swim, withdrew her name from the diving contest and disappeared. Ruth, therefore, won this also. Afterward she sought Tom with a troubled glance.

"She really won, Tom."

"You know how," he replied. "It made me boil. I couldn't let her get away with it."

"Maybe it was an accident. It might have been."

"Didn't you see her face?"

"Yes—but oh! but I wish you hadn't," Ruth said miserably.

CHAPTER XIII

JACK

“TO-DAY Jack comes,” Bee announced.

“I am going to go right down to the Horse-shoe after breakfast and camp there for the rest of the day,” said Carol. “Nothing and nobody will budge me from that place.”

“They have a wonderful day to travel up in their aeroplane,” Mrs. Stafford observed, glancing through the clear windows at the sparkling outdoors.

It was indeed beautiful. A bright sun had early shredded a thick fog until the last bit clinging to the top of old Bear Cat had disappeared into the blue sky. The world looked washed and clean and happy, and the air was filled with the warm sweet scent of evergreens drawn out by the heat of the sun.

“What time will they come, Jeanne, do you know?” Tom asked.

She looked up from her plate and shook her

head. Her big brown eyes were starry with excitement, and her cheeks were flushed. Tom, looking at her, thought she had never appeared lovelier. She was wearing a blue jersey sport dress, its short skirt falling in graceful pleats over her slim young figure. A bandanna, gay in Paisley colorings, was knotted about her shoulders. But there was something other than her attractive clothes that drew all eyes to her. It was the glow of excitement and the odd far-away look in her eyes that gave teasing comments a pause. Jack's coming was to mean more to Jeanne than to anyone there.

True to her promise, Carol departed with cushions and fancy work to a shady spot in the open field after breakfast. The boys after getting the drinking water from the spring followed her, and Bee and Ruth, whose turn it was to wipe dishes, hurried through their tasks in order to join them.

By eleven o'clock the excitement was intense. Everyone on the Point was either in the field or peering from porches and cottage windows. It was thrilling enough to have an aeroplane land in their midst, and stay long enough to

be examined and talked over and—who knows?—give them a ride—some of the lucky ones, that is—but add to that an injured doctor, a returned war hero, the brother of one of the girls, the man who had discovered and saved Jeanne Lanier! Conversation buzzed and bumbled in the heat of the day until Tom, appearing finally, declared they sounded like a swarm of angry bees.

Suddenly a faint humming noise came to their ears. It grew louder and louder until in the blue distance far up over the lake, someone spied a tiny black speck.

“It’s coming! I see it!” Carol cried.

They were all on their feet in a minute watching the speck grow larger, hover for an instant over the lake and then swoop down toward them.

“Where’s Jeanne, Tom?” Ruth asked in a low voice.

“Isn’t she here?” He looked about him.

“She hasn’t been all the morning. She must hear it, but I do think someone ought to find her and make sure.”

Tom nodded and ran, unobserved, back to the house.



HER FACE LIFTED TO THE GREAT GRAY AEROPLANE

It was silent and apparently empty. He called Jeanne by name once or twice but no one answered. Katie and Mrs. Stafford were down waiting with the crowd. In some perplexity he went part way up the stairs and called again, softly.

"I'm here," finally came answer from Jeanne's room. "Come up, Tom."

In two leaps Tom stood by the open door, looking with some amazement at Jeanne kneeling by the window, her back to him, her face lifted to the great gray aeroplane that was now thundering down toward the meadow. She rose and came toward him. Her eyes were filled with tears though a smile was on her lips. She laid a cold little hand on Tom's and said:

"I can't go down there—and meet him—with all of them there staring. I can't explain why. I'd cry ——" she dabbed at her eyes, then flung up her head and pushed Tom from her. "Go down, if you please,—and whisper to my Dr. Jack that I am waiting here. Will you, Tom?"

And Tom, looking down into the lovely face so near his, felt his heart jump and then go thumping heavily in his chest. What wouldn't

he do for her? He patted her hand gently, told her of course, and he understood, and Jack would be up here in a few moments. Now she must dry her eyes and come down and be ready for him.

Jeanne laid a wet cheek against his coat sleeve for a brief moment.

"How you always help me!" she murmured. "Always. Up ladders on boats, and down-stairs in houses." She laughed a little tremulously. "Your goodness to me curls around my heart like a warm hand. It is precious to have you for a friend. Now go. I will be down in a moment."

But she didn't go down in a moment. She dropped on her bed and sat with hands clasped and from there she slipped suddenly to her knees again, not saying a word, not thinking, scarcely breathing. Just waiting for the moment to pass until she heard footsteps come crunching up the stony walk and mount the verandah steps. An odd tapping noise came with the steps.

Her feet were winged as she flew down to the shadowed living-room. There she stood perfectly still, her heart knocking as the screen

door opened and a hauntingly familiar figure entered. For a second they stared at each other, then Jack's cane was flung aside as Jeanne with a low cry sprang forward, both hands out to meet his, a sob choking the words in her throat.

She saw a Dr. Jack whose hair was still bronzed and crisp and wavy, whose figure was still stalwart and straight but whose laughing eyes were hidden behind dark glasses and whose laughing mouth was set in a straight line.

"Take 'em off, Dr. Jack," Jeanne said in a trembling little voice. "Can't you for a minute?"

But he shook his head and at that Jeanne quite suddenly flung her arms about his neck, drew his face down and kissed him.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she whispered. "But oh! Dr. Jack! Oh! Dr. Jack! I'm so glad to have you here."

"Jeanne! Little Jeanne!" He still held her hands but pushed her from him to examine her more closely. "How you have grown up! Why, I don't know you at all."

"Oh, Dr. Jack! Don't say that. Because

Jeanne's House Party

"I am just the same inside me." She smiled with a strange bright wistfulness at him.

"I wonder if you are." He looked at her a long moment. "Are you happy?"

Jeanne drew a long breath, put a hand on her breast and answered quite simply:

"Now I am."

They went out on the verandah, Jeanne leading him by the arm because she could not bear to see him feel his way with his cane, and sat in the swing. The rest of the people were still crowded about Mr. Pryce and the aeroplane. Jack turned to her suddenly. Didn't she want to go down? He was going to take them for a ride—her friends of the house party at least. Didn't she want a ride? Truly?

Then he watched with some delight the delicately changing color in Jeanne's face as she replied:

"I'd be willing to miss a million rides to see you alone for a little while." It was said softly with a frankness that relieved it from sentimentality. Then stretching out a little hand to lay it on his, Jeanne lifted her lovely brown eyes and went on:

"I have thought so much about you, Dr.

Jack, and I have prayed so hard for you to come back to me, and when I knew you were going to I was terribly afraid I would cry when I first saw you. Which was a thing I did not want the others to see. Did I cry?"

"A little. But so did I."

"And we used to have such big laughs together; do you remember, Dr. Jack?"

"Indeed I do, but can't you call me Jack now, Jeanne, without the Dr.?"

Jeanne looked at him with a funny little look in her eyes.

"If I call you Jack, just plain Jack," she said, "it would make me feel very fresh."

Jack tipped back his head and roared with delight.

"You *are* the same."

"But I will do it," Jeanne said determinedly. "How long can you stay with us here—Jack?"

"I don't think I'll ever be able to tear myself away," he answered.

"There's nothing sick about your tongue, anyway."

"My tongue can still wag, and my heart can still be very glad or very sad, and all the

rest of me"—he stretched his arms, tensing his muscles and then relaxing—"all the rest of me feels like a spirited colt. It's just these—eyes."

"Yes," Jeanne said softly, "but they will be all right in time."

"It's going to take a long time, Jeanne."

"I hope it does, Jack," Jeanne said fiercely. "I hope it takes till the war is over."

They were alone together for about an hour. Then Katie came hustling back, talking to herself as she hurried.

"—an' him shtayin' to lunch—and it twelve o'clock now—an' apple-sauce to make—an' biscuits for the crowd av thim ——"

She threw up her hands and groaned as she walked by the verandah to the back door.

"What's the matter, Katie?"

Katie stopped in her tracks.

"It's that Misther Kelly, Miss Jeanny." (Katie could not be persuaded that the last "e" in Jeanne's name was not to be pronounced. "Phwat's it there for?" she demanded.) "He eats a whole batch o' biscuits at wan sitting and wonders whoy there aren't more."

Following her came Mrs. Stafford with Steve and Harry, Bee and Ruth. Carol trailed behind, talking animatedly to Mr. Pryce, who had been persuaded to stay for luncheon. Tom still hung over the aeroplane with a few others, and it took a shrill whistle to call him back even to Katie's biscuits.

Mrs. Stafford sat at the head of the long table and looked with pride and interest at the young people about her. The transformation in Ruth was a daily amazement to her. She sat talking to Mr. Pryce, making herself interested and interesting, her great gray eyes looking at a world she had discovered to be filled with friendliness and kind wishes, with an alertness that had not been there two weeks before. Once in a while a wave of self-consciousness would sweep over her and she would fall into silence, but Mrs. Stafford noticed that Tom's eyes generally met hers at these moments; they would exchange a meaningful smile and Ruth would rise courageously to effort again. Her yellow sweater was invariably very becoming to her dark coloring.

Carol had never been more attractive than she was at this moment. She was wearing a

black and white pleated skirt and a thin black sweater over a white blouse. Her hair had been blown about in her ride up in the aeroplane and she had not taken time up-stairs to rearrange it. Its rather attractive confusion about her face made her appear, for the first time since she had been there, unaware of herself. And Mrs. Stafford believed, as she watched her listening to Dr. Jack who was talking quietly to her, that she really was forgetting herself for a moment. What could they be talking about? Dr. Jack was grave—or was it his dark glasses made him appear so? No, for Carol was grave too, more serious than anyone had ever seen her. Was it possible there were undiscovered depths of sweetness and purpose in her?

Steve and Harry were teasing Bee by snatching her biscuits from her plate. When she turned toward one, the other turned thief. At last in desperation she piled them in her lap and covered them with her napkin.

"There! Now they're safe!" she cried triumphantly, and proceeded to eat her dinner. No one noticed big Tom a little while later reach quietly under the table and somehow

get hold of the fringe of her napkin and jerk it to the floor. Much mystery when Bee in a few moments put her hand down in her lap and failed to find her hidden treasure. She accused Steve, then Harry, but their sincere protestations of innocence were unmistakable.

“—eleven, twelve, thirteen ——” Tom murmured, biting into them as fast as he could. “Findings—keepings. I guess I’ve had enough.” He turned a comical eye on a flattered Katie.

But it was Jeanne of whom Mrs. Stafford was most proud. Jeanne whose dignity had daintiness, whose humor had charm, whose thoughtfulness was instinctive and whom no amount of flattering attention could seem to spoil.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BEACH PARTY

Mrs. STAFFORD's first inclination was to coddle Jack and make a semi-invalid of him. It did not seem possible to her that a man could return from the front, after working eighteen and twenty hours a day, and after spending two months in a hospital, and feel quite strong and ambitious.

"But these two months in the hospital *made* me, Aunt Bee," he assured her laughing. "I had nothing to do but eat and sleep for the first month. After that they gave me a little light work such as washing hundreds of dishes three times a day ——"

"Hundreds!" Carol cried.

He nodded, smiling.

"And so soon as I was up, I began doing exercises to get in condition again. I didn't know, you see, until the end of my stay there, that I wasn't to go back to the front."

His mouth settled into its straight line again with an expression of pain. Jeanne laid a sympathetic hand on his sleeve, then spoke quickly.

“So long as you feel so frisky, we will see that you frisk. We’ve been wanting a beach party for weeks and I think it’s time we had it to-night, don’t you, everybody?”

Everybody apparently did, so Jeanne told them of the “Glen,” a delightful place about a quarter of a mile down the road. It was deeply caverned and rocky, and mysterious with deep black pools and echoes and filtering moonlight.

“You, Ruth, are appointed official cook,” Jeanne announced demurely.

“Thanks, awfully. Why this honor?”

“Well, if you don’t, Bee or I have to and we’ve done it every time so far. We think you’ve learned how to cook outdoors by this time.”

“Very well, but the cook reserves the right to choose two right hand assistants.”

“Volunteers allowed?” Tom asked, looking up.

“If they happen to be the persons I had in

mind," Ruth answered with that new authority she found so surprisingly delightful. "You, Tom, may build fireplaces and hunt water. Steve, you shall be general—what shall I say?"

"Office boy or scullery servant, it's one and the same," Steve said dismally. "I know what it means. I get more dirt and less food than anyone there."

They all laughed at that. Then Ruth suggested that before they go swimming the committee ought to walk down there and pick out the best place for the supper.

"Some rocks make better tables and fireplaces than others, you know."

"They all make the same kind of chairs, though," Harry, the thin one, observed. "I always find more bones in myself on a picnic than at any other time."

They strolled down to the dusty road and leisurely made their way to the Glen.

It was a hot day and they were all glad to drop down in the cool shadows of the great open caves where water dripped from mossy ever-changing rocks in a tantalizingly cool and deliberate way.

"If only we'd thought to wear our bathing suits." Steve eyed the still black water enviously.

Jeanne shivered a little as she leaned over and looked into the depths of the pond.

"They say this has no bottom. There's something sinister about it. It's so dark and quiet. If I should ever fall into one of these pools I do believe I'd simply be too scared even to take a stroke."

She jumped up suddenly.

"Oh, don't let's have the picnic here. It's too creepy. Let's go back along that little path out toward the road again. There's an open place there, where there's grass and a big tree, and the caverns and rocks can be the background. I somehow don't like sitting right *in* them. Under them."

The others seemed to share her feeling, so Ruth, as Mistress of Ceremonies, set Tom and Steve to work erecting a fireplace while the others strolled back toward the cottage to get ready for the swim.

Jeanne was ahead, with Harry and Bee, so Carol found herself loitering along beside Jack whose blindness made him move more

slowly. For a reason unaccountable to herself she was silent, and in an increasing discomfort of mind she moved beside him, discarding as inappropriate all the light, laughing remarks that came so easily to her tongue with other boys. There were a million things she wanted to ask him, but there was something about Dr. Jack that checked presumptuous curious questions. She finally flung out her hands and said in an irritated embarrassment:

“ I don’t know how to talk to you. I don’t know what to say. I never felt so queer.”

Her face was flushed, her voice petulant. Jack turned his gaze toward her.

“ That’s it,” Carol said half laughing, half pouting. “ It’s your glasses; they’re so big—and black—and they spread all over your face. You can see me—and I can’t see you at all. I can’t see what you’re thinking.”

“ I can’t see you as well as you think I can. It’s a sort of Blind Man’s Buff. I can’t see what *you* think, either. So, with both of us feeling our way ——”

“ We won’t get very far.”

Jack stopped to light his pipe. His cane dropped from under his arm to the ground and

Carol watched him grope about in the dust for it. Suddenly a little thrill of compassion ran through her. She stopped, picked up the cane, thrust it into his waiting fingers and walked along beside him in another embarrassed silence.

“Thanks,” he said. Then a great deal later, he asked her if she had ever been hurt.

“Yes—no—yes,” she stammered. “My—my feelings have been. Is that what you mean?”

“Sometimes that’s the worst hurt of all, if it’s really your feelings and not your pride. When was it?”

Carol had been thinking of the day of the Regatta when Tom had given the race to Ruth instead of herself, but at his words about pride she flushed suddenly. There leaped to her mind another instance, the time when the doctor had told her there was nothing in the world keeping her in bed but selfishness and silliness. That too—had her pride been hurt?

“I guess,” she said, with a sudden meekness, “I guess I don’t know the difference between pride and feelings.”

Jack laughed at that, quite suddenly, and Carol felt better.

“ I wish you'd go on talking about that little girl you were telling me about at lunch. That was awfully interesting. What happened to her? ”

It was the story of another little fugitive like Jeanne. A little girl of twelve who had been separated from her family and whose later orphanage left her alone in a vast world. Dr. Jack had manœuvred again and had succeeded in helping her to England where she was adopted by a maiden lady of mature years.

“ I'd like to help somebody like that,” Carol said suddenly. Then she flushed. It was an unusual and unexpected thing for her to say, but Jack seemed not surprised.

“ You can,” he told her easily. “ You could send a part of your allowance every month to the right authorities in France and it would help clothe and feed a child in one of the great camps like the one where Jeanne was cared for. You could pretend to adopt her for your own. You could write her letters—do you know French at all? ”

“ Oh, yes! ” Carol assured him excitedly.

“ And you could exchange pictures —— ”

“ Oh, that would be wonderful. Will you give me the address when we get back to the cottage, Dr. Jack? ”

That was the beginning of a change in Carol that everyone saw and welcomed. Somehow Dr. Jack's coming, his gravity, his helplessness, his experiences, had stripped Carol of all her gay artificiality. She wanted, with an unreasoning and unreasonable passion, to have Dr. Jack like her, not to make the mistake with him that she had with Tom whose cheerful friendliness everyone except herself was enjoying. It was difficult for a while to find herself deprived of her usual resources of entertainment. It was not that Dr. Jack disapproved of the conceited, selfish, daring person she might be. If he had disapproved as Tom had she might have flared defiance again. But he simply ignored her. He simply turned those great dark glasses on her and then away from her when she lapsed into forgetfulness and snapped out something that bordered on rudeness or audacity. And she “ shrivelled up,” as she put it to herself.

She wrote her first letter that afternoon, and

brought it, after the swim, to Jack for approval. She had to read it to him, which was a bit of an embarrassment at first, but his whole bearing was so friendly and generous that it became very soon an easy matter not only to talk to him but to confide in him.

"I don't want anybody to know I'm doing this. You won't tell, will you?" she asked, folding up the letter and slipping it in its envelope.

"Not if you'd rather I didn't. But why, I wonder?"

Carol flushed. It was hard to explain. This course of action on her part was unexpected and inexplicable. She shrank from the surprised stares and amused comments that she felt sure would follow her disclosure. She might even be suspected by honest Tom of "playing up" to win Jack's admiration. Well, perhaps she was. She wasn't sure. Her motive wasn't clear to herself. She only knew she was enjoying herself since Jack came as she hadn't for days.

So she dressed that night for the Beach Party humming a little tune, and when Ruth came into the bedroom from Jeanne's in her

kimono, her hair brush in her hand, Carol quite forgot herself for a moment, looked up and smiled and cried:

“ Oh, Ruth! I *never* saw your hair look so pretty! ”

Ruth paused in amazement. Self-consciousness rushed back on Carol. The two girls stood and stared at each other in silence, then Ruth spoke eagerly:

“ Why thanks, Carol. Does it really? What are you going to wear to-night? ”

The ice was broken. The olive branch extended and accepted. Ruth stayed in her own room and finished dressing for the first time in weeks and they went down-stairs together, chatting happily as in the first days of the house party.

There was a slice of moon laughing in a rosy sky at sunset when Ruth, Tom and Steve walked down the road ahead of the crowd to get things started. In their absorption of building two fireplaces, one for cooking, one for comfort and cheer, they did not notice that the sunset soon faded and a gray blanket of clouds like a thin mist spread over the sky.

The potatoes were boiling merrily, the corn

half cooked, the steak making a cheerful sizzle and the coffee sending out its pungent odor when the rest of the young people arrived. Darkness had fallen and Harry's voice calling out to them surprised them.

"Water for the first and last course."

"What do you mean? Is it raining?" Ruth asked in amazement.

"I'd call it that," and Harry, followed by the others, came under the shelter of the huge pine tree which had so spread its branches over the cooks and their fires that not a drop had penetrated.

But the spirits of the crowd could not be dampened. They ate their supper leisurely with a fine sprinkle sifting down on them. When this turned to a steady little rain they huddled together under raincoats and sweaters and sang. But when it began to pour and puddles formed in their laps and the wet leaked down their necks they admitted themselves beaten and began to pack up to return.

"Why not go down to your boat house, Jeanne?" someone suggested, "and get cushions and finish our evening and our song-fête down there?"

“Good idea,” Jeanne agreed enthusiastically.

So they stored away the pots and pans and other utensils in a box and stuffed it back on the floor of one of the cars. Then after burning up the rubbish and leaving the picnic place as clean as they had found it, they themselves got into two cars (the Allens’ and Mrs. Stafford’s) that were standing out in the rain, and were driven back to the boat house.

Electric lights encased in Japanese lanterns were hung up-stairs in the glassed-in room where the Victrola stood and made it very attractive with their soft rosy glow, but perversely enough the boys and girls did not want to stay indoors where it was warm and dry, and dance. They must go out on the wide balcony where the wet breeze blew a soft mist into their faces and the sound of the falling drops made music on the lake below.

Cushions and an old mattress were hauled out of the closet from inside and spread out on the floor, then, shoulder to shoulder, they dropped down, resting their backs against the wall of the boat house. None of them could sing particularly well, but they all loved music

and knew some of the popular songs as well as the old favorites. In the pauses between songs Tom would break out into some ditty that he had learned on shipboard. It was always rollicking, always funny, but Tom's big untrained voice conveyed an idea of noise rather than music.

At last they wearied and one by one fell silent. The dripping of the rain from the roof into the water below was the only sound to be heard except for their voices which now and then broke the quiet. At last a brightness seemed to fill the sky, and as the clouds rolled away in the darkness the silver moon cut the black heavens like a sickle.

"Oh, it is lovely," Jeanne sighed.

"Most wonderful place in the world," Carol added.

A sigh of agreement from Ruth, a grunt from Bee, and the spell was broken. Up they jumped, stretching stiffened limbs, and with the contrariness of youth, now that the evening was clear and the moon out, they all trooped back inside the boat house to dance.

CHAPTER XV

BAD NEWS FOR CAROL

THE summer days sped by. With Jack's coming and Carol's consequent change of manner, all the difficulties and disappointments that had harassed Jeanne since the beginning of her house party seemed to disappear. Ruth and Carol had now finally reëstablished a friendship that, with mutual understanding and forgiveness as a basis, promised this time to be lasting. But the renewal of diplomatic relations between these two had not broken off the intimacy lately sprung up between Ruth and Jeanne and Bee. There was not, as there had been earlier in the summer, a sharp line separating the two pairs of chums. They all four mingled in a happy companionship that had been Jeanne's dream since she sent out the invitations. They dressed together, giggled together, whispered together. Advice was given generously and taken as generously. Comments were bandied

about gaily and accepted in the same spirit. An atmosphere of helpfulness and sympathy and affection prevailed. Song and laughter were heard all day long in the white cottage at the peak of the horseshoe.

It didn't matter, now, whether or not there was some activity planned for every day left of the boys' stay. They had a good time doing nothing. Ted was about again, on crutches, and he hobbled over every morning, established himself in the swing with his ukulele and enlivened the hours of housework. The girls came and went, with brooms and dust cloths and dish towels. Sometimes they paused for a song or a dance on the verandah, sometimes they energetically flapped the symbols of their duties in the laughing faces of their guests. But though the work was interrupted it was never neglected and the boys themselves, more often than not, assisted in the accomplishment of their tasks.

About ten-thirty the day stretched before them to be filled in with pleasure and fun. A warm summer haze filled the air. The heat made them languid. They sat about on Jeanne's broad verandah—and by this time

Vic and the Allen cousins would probably have arrived—and talked or sang or sewed. The phonograph was played in a desultory fashion. Funny stories were read aloud. About eleven-thirty they all drifted away to get into their bathing suits.

In the cool water their “pep” came back to them. The boys dared each other in a series of stunts, the most reckless being a high dive from the roof of the Staffords’ boat house. It was difficult enough to climb up its steep sides with nothing to hold to, but to dive from that dizzy height was appalling. The girls held their breath in fear and admiration as the boys climbed like flies up the supporting pillars of the verandah, pulled themselves up over the sharp edge of the roof and dug fingers and toes into bare shingles in their upward ascent.

Once was enough for all but Steve and Tom, but those two seemed to enjoy it and repeated the performance with unflagging energy. The girls contented themselves with “nose-dives” from the diving board. Bee had become quite daring and was sturdily imitating everything the more experienced girls—Carol and Ruth—did, but Jeanne’s determined efforts availed her

little. She could swim now a short distance in a fairly easy manner, but she was disturbed at any "ruff-housing" in the water, floundered and splashed and sank at the mischievous approach of any of the boys.

After the swim came one of Katie's delicious lunches. She scolded them and spoiled them regularly. There was always a delicious cold drink prepared by two of the girls in the morning, usually hot bread of some kind, thin sliced cold meat, a dainty salad and fruit for dessert. The supper meal was always simple and as few dishes were soiled as possible.

After lunch the crowd was inclined to break up into smaller groups. The boys usually had more energy than the girls. Bee was always willing to be paddled out on the lake. She never seemed to mind the glare and heat. It made Carol and Jeanne feel rather ill. They kept to the darkened cottage or the shadowed woods behind the houses. Ruth never turned down an invitation to play tennis no matter what the thermometer registered. She and Tom usually repaired to the tennis court where a few other ones braved the heat with them. Bee would go out on the water with Steve or

Vic, and Jeanne drifted away to the boat house with Jack. Sometimes Carol accompanied them, sometimes she stayed at home with Harry or Ted. It was usually at this time that she wrote her letter to her "adopted sister."

The news of her undertaking had somehow leaked out. She had confided in Ruth and had met Ruth's pleasure and envy with a scarcely concealed pride.

"Oh, if only I had money enough to do something lovely like that!" was her quick cry. "But why can't I tell, Carol? The others would be so interested!"

So Carol's consent was half-heartedly given and after that she had to read aloud her entertaining letters from her grateful little French sister. Her act had farther reaching consequences than she had imagined. Jeanne decided to do the same thing with her allowance and the Allen girls, hearing of the scheme, adopted a French orphan between them.

There usually followed a short afternoon swim about four-thirty and after that with the sinking of the sun and lengthening of cool dark shadows came an animation and zest that had

been lacking all day. There were lively disputes as to whether an automobile ride, a skim over the lake in the Allens' launch or a stroll up to the Glen would be the nicest thing to do. Usually, again, the crowd split. Half would lazily sink into the cushioned seats of the launch or the car and half would take the lovely walk through the woods along the path that led out to the bluff overlooking the Glen. From the end of this path which stopped abruptly where shale and slate made a rough descent to the black pools and rocky caverns below, a glorious view of the whole of Lake Sunnapine could be obtained. It was the mecca for lovers of a lovely sunset and was Jeanne's favorite haunt.

The glen below her, echoing mysteriously, silent and dark and secretive, fascinated and repelled her. She would not have gone there alone for worlds but in company she felt its spell and responded to its weird beauty with all her French temperament.

"And," she told Jack, "when it gets me too shivery, I just look up from the black waters down there, to the blue lake and the white clouds and the lovely sunset over the tops of

the trees and my heart gets light and dancing again."

And in the evening—dancing, always dancing. Either at the Point club house or over at the big park. It didn't matter a great deal. The park offered ice-cream cones and darkened woods where talking might go on uninterrupted, and better music and a moonlight sail over in the big steamer. They went to the park every night that it was open. In between times the Point club house was a more than satisfactory place.

* * * * *

It was mid-afternoon of the last week that Tom and the twins were to be there. Bee was out on the water; Ruth on the tennis court; Carol had disappeared in the neighboring woods with Ted and his ukulele; Jeanne' was in the boat house, out on the overhanging verandah with Jack.

She had just arranged cushions under his head as he lay in the hammock with a deft touch on which he complimented her, when the sharp tinkle of the telephone in the house borne to her ears through the still air, brought her to an upright position.

“ Oh! that's too bad. Mother has gone to lie down—she had a headache—I think I'd better run back to the house and answer that so she won't have to come down-stairs. Katie's out.”

“ All right, don't be long, Jeanne.”

“ No longer than possible, Jack,” Jeanne said softly. “ I'll be back to read to you our nice story in two jiffs.”

She sped away to the house, her thoughts on Jack. Another long summons of the telephone jerked them from him to the matter at hand. She wondered who it could be. No one telephoned up here. They were the only cottage on the point to boast a telephone. It must be—why, what—who—after all, could it be?

“ Perhaps it's a telegram. Tom called back to service—or something like that.”

She met her mother at the foot of the stairs. Mrs. Stafford was in a kimono. Jeanne cried her contrition to her mother that she hadn't gotten back quickly enough to save her coming down-stairs, took down the receiver, then turned to her mother.

“ A telegram for you, *cherie*,” she said softly.

She stood in silence at her mother's elbow, a

sudden premonition of disaster seizing her even before she saw horror leap to her mother's eyes, her face pale, and the hand that held the receiver shake.

"Read that again, please," Mrs. Stafford said quietly and at her voice Jeanne's little hands met in a tight clasp.

Bad news for someone. For whom? The twins? Their sister worse? The baby ill, or their mother, after her weeks of nursing? Bee? She dismissed Bee from her mind. It wasn't for Bee—or Ruth? Mother Stafford herself?

Mrs. Stafford hung up the receiver, looked about her quickly, passed a trembling hand over her eyes a moment, then said quietly:

"Come up-stairs, Jeanne, with me. This is frightful."

Up in her room she closed the door and then spoke to Jeanne in that dreadfully quiet voice that was so frightening.

"Carol's mother and father were in an automobile accident."

"Mother ——" Jeanne could not ask the question that stuck in her throat.

"They were both killed instantly."

Jeanne was unbelieving—dazed. Then with a low cry of pity she burst into tears. At that Mrs. Stafford dried her own and took command of the situation.

“Jeanne, you must control yourself. It is for you and me to hold Carol steady through this. We can’t unless we are steady ourselves. Dry your tears. There, sweetheart, I understand. It’s your very real sympathy that makes it so difficult. You *know*. But you must find Carol for me, dear, and bring her here at once.”

Mrs. Stafford’s quiet voice regained for Jeanne her badly shaken composure. In a few moments she was by the door, white, but self-contained, listening to her mother’s last directions.

“I shan’t ask you not to tell her. If she suspects bad news—and the way opens—I leave it to you, dear. You can probably manage as well as I.”

So Jeanne went down-stairs to meet Jack who was on a search for her. She told him the news in a quiet voice, then went on out to the verandah and down the steps to the strip of woods between her cottage and the next one.

She found Carol alone, seated on a broad flat mossy rock writing her letter. Carol looked up smiling, waved a hand, stopped it in mid-air and rose to her feet, her paper fluttering to the ground beside her.

“Why, Jeanne—what on earth?—you’re as white as a ghost.”

Jeanne’s smile was shaky. She tried to speak, failed utterly and ended by flinging her arms about her cousin and holding her tight.

“Oh, Carol!” she whispered. “Oh, Carol! We all love you so! Don’t forget that. We all love you.”

Carol stood still in Jeanne’s arms until at last Jeanne drew away. Then Carol, her pretty head high, faced Jeanne bravely.

“What’s happened? You’d better tell me straight out. I can stand it. I can stand anything better than not knowing. What’s happened?”

So Jeanne told her, as quickly and gently as possible, and when she had done, Carol still stood with her head high and her eyes brave. She drew a long breath and her voice when it came was steady.

“Thank you. Now we’ll go to Aunt Bee.

I must find out what to do. Thank you, Jeanne."

She gave the French girl's clinging arms a little squeeze, then walked back with her to the cottage. Through the living-room she went, without seeing Jack, who rose to speak to her, then dropped back before her swift forward rush. Jeanne stayed down-stairs with Jack, but when the sound of voices had gone on steadily for a few moments up-stairs she rose.

"I guess she's not going to cry. Sometimes you don't—till later. I think I'll go up. Jack, keep away the others till I find out if she wants to see them."

Carol was, indeed, wonderful. She wanted the truth, all Mrs. Stafford could give her, and she took it unflinchingly. Her parents had been on a motor trip for the week-end. On the way home another car had crashed into them in the darkness injuring their chauffeur and killing them both almost instantly.

"I will pack my things." She rose. "What train do we take?"

"It leaves in an hour. Carol, dear ——"

"Yes, Auntie?"

“Just take enough for a few days. You will come back with me, you know.”

“Yes. Thank you, Auntie.”

Carol seemed to be rather glad the other girls and boys weren't in the house. She put her hands in Jack's when she went down-stairs and looked at him with a new grave dignity.

“You're a brave soldier, Carol,” Jack said in a husky voice, patting her hand, and across Carol's face slipped a sudden sweet smile.

Jeanne rode with her mother and Carol to the station. On the way Mrs. Stafford was busy giving directions for the time she was away, and Carol sat quite still in a corner of the car, her face turned away. As the limousine drew up at the shabby little station she turned toward Jeanne, her eyes bright with tears.

“I can't help thinking how much harder this same thing must have been for you—in the war—all alone ——”

She caught Jeanne's hand, lifted it suddenly to her cheek and then jumped out of the car.

“It's that that helps me be brave—if I am brave,” she said.

CHAPTER XVI

A WALK IN THE WOODS

MRS. STAFFORD had telephoned to M'amselle with whom she had kept in touch since her departure from the lake. It developed that the Frenchwoman was not busy and would be only too glad to hurry to the lake to chaperone the house party in Mrs. Stafford's absence. She would arrive that evening after supper.

So Jeanne drove to the station again that day to meet M'amselle. She took Bee with her and the two of them gave to the sympathetic M'amselle the story of the tragedy that concerned Carol.

"She was so brave, M'amselle ——" Jeanne cried.

"You wouldn't know her for the same person," Bee said.

And they went on to tell how she had adopted for her own the little war orphan in France; how kind and thoughtful she had been with Ruth most of the summer; how cheerfully

she had learned to do her share of the work and how much less silly she was with boys.

“And she’s stopped her smoking entirely,” Jeanne ended.

M’amselle looked down fondly into the two eager faces near hers. Then a soft hand was laid on each of theirs and a soft voice spoke gentle words of the little girl who had made life for her a series of difficulties and heartaches.

“I always felt that Carol had splendid qualities,” she said, “and I hoped sometime life would bring them out. It seems that you dear ones have so succeeded—and now this so very hard sorrow—that too will, I believe, increase her strength and sweetness.”

Back at the cottage M’amselle was introduced to the boys and very soon after that she went up to Mrs. Stafford’s room. Her journey had been long and her departure hurried and she was tired. She would change her clothes and rest and be down to join them a little later.

The young people remained on the porch when she had left them. Carol’s grief had shocked them all and they none of them felt like doing anything.

It was about half-past eight when someone suggested a walk to the store for ice-cream. A few seemed willing, others did not. In the end they all went strolling down the road except Jack and Jeanne, who stayed on the porch.

"We'll bring you some, Jeanne," Bee called back.

"All right. Thank you." Then Jeanne turned to Jack. "I simply can't bear it—to go among people and talk and pretend nothing is the matter when my heart aches so I think it may *crack*, Jack."

"Brings it all back, does it, Jeanne?"

Jeanne nodded, then she began talking softly.

"Most of the time it is a bad dream, something so bad that it never really happened. It doesn't seem real, when I remember it,—not the blowing up of our house, or the hiding in cellars, or Grandma's dying, or anything until I got to camp. Then I remember being so sick and so tired and I didn't want to get well. Except to thank you. I did want to get well enough to thank you for bringing me there and promising me a new mother, and being so nice

to me—but it seemed at times as though I'd be too tired to do that. Do you know?"

"Yes, I know."

"But I kept on trying, and finally I did. And then after that, life became real again. The cold nights in the tents and the busy days helping to care for all those infants, and the warm sunlight times when you came and laughed with me—do you remember?"

"Indeed I do."

"And the ride to the ocean, Jack, do you recall? That so very cold day when I had given away my new clothes and you made me buy other ones with your money so I should not freeze ——"

"What a figure you cut in your overalls and new coat!"

"But the ride. Ah! Jack. That for me was most important, because that day when I saw the steamer go out to America a little seed was sowed in my mind that took root."

"I never have heard all about your stow-away trip, Jeanne. There hasn't been half a chance to talk to you since I've been here. You've always been surrounded except for the bits of half hours down in the boat house."

"I will tell you now. It was very much fun—after the seasick departed."

Jack rose.

"Come on for a walk then. Everybody'll be piling back in a little while and your story will be interrupted."

"All right, but can you see, Jack, to walk with comfort?"

"Perhaps you'll help me a little."

So Jeanne tucked her little hand under his big arm and with his cane tap-tapping along the road, they moved out into the darkness.

"Let's take the back-road," Jeanne suggested. "It is used less by automobiles and there are not the ruts and bumps for you to stumble over."

So they turned toward the rear of the cottage and soon came out in the country road. There was a fragrance in the air back here that was lost in the more open, clearer air down by the lake, and the companionable noise of frogs and crickets was observable. Sounds like that went unnoticed in front of the cottages because the overtones of voices and music and oarlocks and water drowned them out.

“Cozy back here,” Jack said. “Why haven’t we done this before?”

“And it’s such a heavenly night, Jack. Can you see? Millions and millions and millions of bright little stars. It’s better than a moon, I think.”

Jack looked up, then he laughed ruefully. “Your bright little stars look like wind-blown candles in a snow-storm to me.”

“Dr. Jack ——”

Jeanne gave his arm a little squeeze and he said quickly:

“You were going to tell me about your trip home on the big boat.”

So Jeanne began, and they became so interested,—she in reliving her life as a stowaway for him, and he in having all the details about which he had wondered often filled in—that they moved on and on entirely unaware of direction and time until they found themselves on the path that led them to the bluff overhanging the glen.

“Why, for goodness sake!” Jeanne cried. “How did we get here? It must be late, Jack. Have you a watch?”

“No, but we’ve come so far, let’s go on to

the end of the path, to the place where the ground slides down in a heap of slate to the Bottomless Pool."

"I've always wanted to go there at night," Jeanne said. "Well—if we hurry. But I don't want to distress M'amselle."

"We'll hurry. The path is smooth."

So they pushed on through the still, fragrant woods, not talking now, but each of them enjoying the silence after all. There was, every now and then, the cheep of a bird, the startled flutter of something in the grass, the rustle of bushes and the plop! of water as a frog would disappear into a hidden puddle.

In a few moments the path left the woods and they were out in the open again on the edge of the bluff. Above them the spangled sky hung like a glittering banner. Below that the quiet waters of the lake reflected the tiny stars in a perfect and marvellous way. It was hard, as Jeanne told Jack, to tell just exactly where sky ended and water began.

Then she dropped her eyes to the Glen below her and shuddered.

"Oh, I don't know why this place gives me

the shivers, but it does. The pools are blacker than ever at night, Jack, and the water dripping from those walls—hark! Hear it?—makes it all seem so cold and lonely. Perhaps it's because I am reminded of France—and the wet cellar where Grandma and I hid for days—and the black pools are like the darkness into which I peeped—ugh!”

She turned sharply.

“Let's go home.”

But Jack, only half seeing her in the darkness, misunderstood her motion and in turning to face about with her he bumped into her. She lost her balance, staggered back a few steps, struck her ankle against a protruding rock and with a half gasped shriek, she fell over the edge of the cliff.

“Jeanne!”

Jack's hands came blindly out. He leaped forward, tore the glasses from his face, felt with his foot for the edge of the cliff and then flung himself flat hanging half off the edge, straining his eyes to see, his ears to hear the dreaded splash as Jeanne went into the black waters below.

He heard stones rattling and clattering, the

sound of Jeanne's body sliding among the sharp pieces of slate that were borne down with her, the scattered splashing of the smaller loosened rocks that must have preceded her to the bottomless pool, more slidings, more splashings, tinier rattling of pebbles, tinier splashings,—then silence.

“Jeanne!”

His voice was a hoarse agonized groan. His eyes, trying desperately to pierce the darkness below him, ached furiously. In his utter helplessness to see, or to make anyone hear if he shouted, or to leave to get help without knowing what had become of Jeanne, he began to swear.

Then he put on his glasses and began to think.

Jeanne had not rolled into the pool. He was quite sure of that. She would have made a bigger sound,—a different splash as her body struck. He was quite positive, as he raked his memory to recall exactly the echo of sounds that had come to his ears, that none of them could have been Jeanne going into the water.

She was then, somewhere between him and the bottom, unconscious, hurt probably,—how

badly he did not know though his imagination conjured up the worst visions—and in danger every second of sliding on down into the pool she so dreaded.

“Jeanne!” he called again.

But not a sound came up to him.

He must, therefore, in his blindness, let himself down over the cliff, working his way or falling to the bottom, searching with outstretched hands and aching eyes—hang these eyes!—for Jeanne as he went, and there was always the danger that he might start an avalanche of stone and rocks down on her bruised body or head; that he himself might loosen the very rocks that were holding her and so send her himself down into the pool.

It was horrible. Anything he did might be worse than doing nothing. But he could not do nothing. In less time than it takes to read he had twisted himself about and begun his downward crawl to find Jeanne.

It was slow work. He had to feel in a wide circle, every inch of the way. Sometimes he slid eight or ten feet at a stretch. That meant a difficult upward pull again to reach out on both sides and be sure he had not missed Jeanne

on the way. It was desperate, heart-breaking business, and the sweat was standing out on Jack's forehead when all of a sudden his foot touched something soft.

With a cry he let himself down to the scrubby little bushes where Jeanne's skirt had caught and held her in safety. Then he lifted her up in his arms. She was still unconscious and something warm and sticky that trickled from her face to his swift searching hands told him she had been cut.

He wiped her eyes and face with her own small handkerchief, then he bound his about the place where it seemed to be bleeding most. That done, he sat still in another quandary.

It would be next to impossible to climb up to the top again with Jeanne a dead weight in his arms. Yet to go down was equally impossible for him in his blindness. He would not be able to discover the narrow little path about the edge of the water that he had seen one of the boys skirt the day they had walked down before the Beach party. He would probably end by stumbling into the pool.

As he sat there, Jeanne stirred in his arms, and then spoke.

“Jack! Where—what ——”

“You’re all right, Jeanne. I have you. Don’t move till you feel quite clear in your head. Then we’ll dig out of here together.”

For a moment she was silent, looking up into the face that was bending anxiously over hers.

“Are you hurt?” Jack suddenly asked. “Anywhere but your head?”

Jeanne laughed at that.

“You boys!” she said softly. “Once when Steve rescued me from under a fallen tree in a thunderstorm, he forgot to ask me that till we were nearly home. No, I am really vairy, vairy comfortable.”

“Well, maybe you are, young lady, but I know I’ll be a lot more comfortable in my mind when I get you to earth again. The question I was trying to decide, when you woke up and rudely interrupted me, was—shall we go back up or down?”

Jeanne shivered.

“Not down, Jack. Not down. We can climb up again, I feel sure. I am quite O. K. now. See!” She sat up straight and stretched out a hand before him. “It does not shake a bit. I have splendid—what you call—

nerve. Come!" She began crawling up the embankment again. "M'amselle will be in a fearful fright, and our ice-cream will be all melted."

It was like Jeanne, on that difficult upward climb, to laugh and joke over the accident. It was like her, when, safely at the top and a fit of dizziness and nausea overcame her for a moment, to say briefly:

"Wait a minute, Jack. The bandage has slipped over my eye."

And Jack, kneeling by her side while she sat on the grass, did not guess, as he adjusted the bandage, that she was fighting off faintness with all the grit she possessed.

The walk home took quite a while, for Jeanne's bandage kept slipping. She kept her hand on Jack's arm but it is a question as to which of them was helping the other. By the time the path through the woods merged into the back-road some of the other people were out hunting for them. Jeanne, hearing their calls, hallowed back, then began to laugh shakily, and by the time big Tom and Ruth had run up to meet them, she had slipped in a quiet heap at Jack's feet.

“She’s hurt. I guess I didn’t realize how badly,” Jack said, stooping over her. But Tom was ahead of him. He picked Jeanne up and strode down the road with her without a look or a word to anyone. Ruth and Jack were left behind and on their way Jack told what had happened.

Tom walked as though he were carrying nothing, and Jeanne, regaining consciousness on the way to the cottage, began to laugh softly.

“Don’t put me in the bottom of the ship! And don’t let the Captain see me!” she whispered.

Tom stopped abruptly and looked down.

“Thank heaven!”

Then he went on, paying no attention to her assurances that she was perfectly all right and entirely able to walk and she felt silly being carried around like an infant. Wouldn’t he please—please—please?

He bore her into the cottage and deposited her on the couch before an alarmed M’am-selle. Jeanne sat up indignantly and glared at him out of one eye from under a gory bandage.

“To scare poor M’amselle so! It is shameful!” she cried. “I must be a sight!”

The others came running in. Jeanne was rushed despite her protestations. M’amselle led her away to her room where she was bathed and bandaged afresh. The cut proved not to be serious although quite deep and bleeding profusely. Jeanne was bruised and cut about her shoulders too, but there were no strains or broken bones.

She lay at last very quietly in her bed with the light darkened by the considerate Bee who moved about the room undressing with as little noise as possible. Voices came up to them in subdued accents from the porch but at last they ceased. Footsteps sounded moving about the house. Soft good-nights were called and soon after Bee had turned off her light the cottage was in quiet. Still Jeanne lay with wide eyes staring into the darkness. She began to shake in her bed and was just gulping back a frightened sob when Bee slipped out of her bed, crept in next to Jeanne and took her in her arms, holding her tightly and with one hand lightly touching her eyelids.

Neither of the girls said a word but Jeanne’s

hysterical shudders lessened gradually and at last she turned quietly toward Bee, laid a soft hand on her face and kissed her.

“ I am O. K. now, dear. Isn't it queer how much worse things are before and after they happen than when they really are happening? Go back to bed now, *cherie*. You are my best friend.”

CHAPTER XVII

JACK TURNS PROPHET

THERE came times during the summer when the wind blew fresh and strong from the north and whipped the placid lake into a tempestuous sea. On those days the gray waves rolled up on the little strip of beach like the ocean, sometimes dashing themselves with such fury on the shore as to reach and spread way up over the roadway. On days like those, everyone who owned a boat hurried to their boat house to be sure that the boats were strongly fastened and were not likely to be pitched about and smashed against the docks. And on those days the boys at Jeanne's house party were to be seen out in warm sweaters vigorously chopping wood.

It was too windy to go out on the lake in any sort of boat, and too cold for swimming. And as the young people liked something more strenuous than walking, Mrs. Stafford had often suggested the woodpile. There was always a pile of long trees stacked at the back

of the house for just such times as these and Mother Stafford wisely killed two birds with one stone—she kept the young people busy and got her wood in shape for the next season.

Even the girls helped. There was a cross-cut saw and two axes and a small hatchet for trimming. Whoever wasn't engaged in the actual business of chopping the wood, would trundle it in a wheelbarrow to the big storage space under the front porch and there stack it in neat piles.

There was another reason for all this activity beside the two already mentioned. A strong blow from the north usually brought with it gray, tumbling clouds, and fine spitting rain. A fire must always be kept burning in the great red brick fireplace of the living-room for cheer as well as comfort, and the kitchen stove was lighted up and kept burning to further warm the house. For during a northeaster the wind found every crack and crevice and it was essential to have a plentiful wood supply.

One such storm blew up during Carol's absence. The first day the boys and girls managed to stay outdoors. The rain was persistent but like a fine mist, and so long as they were

huddled in sweater and thick boots, they could keep comfortable. But by the time dusk fell and the woodpile under the house had reached a reassuring height, it was pouring in torrents. The girls scurried for shelter, hung their wet things before the warm stove in the kitchen and thanked their stars it was up to the boys to get the spring water.

“My, it is cold!” Jeanne cried as she entered the living-room and laid a cold hand against M’amselle’s face as she sat at the desk writing. M’amselle laid her arm and hand against Jeanne’s and then moved it to her lips and pressed a kiss against it. She and Jeanne were very fond of each other.

“I guess I’ll lay the fire and set it going,” Bee said; “the boys will be tired.”

“It’ll be like grease on that path through the woods,” Ruth said. “I never saw such sticky, slippery mud as this is in Vermont.”

Bee moved the screen away from the fireplace and went to her chosen task. She made a pretty picture in her red sweater with her short black hair blown about rosy cheeks. She busily stuffed paper in, then laid small sticks crosswise, longer sticks over that and a big log

on top of the whole. Then she put a match to the pile and as it blazed up she stood erect with a sigh of satisfaction.

Just then the boys trooped in.

“If the road to success is as easy as that path is to slide on, we’d all of us get there!” Jack observed.

“Christopher Columbus! It is the proverbial hog’s back—well oiled,” Steve said, holding out fingers to the bright blaze.

“We spilled at least half the water,” Harry announced cheerfully.

“But we’ve enough in our shoes to make up for a scanty supply,” Tom added. “Bet I know who built this fire.”

“Guess,” Bee said promptly.

“Who other than the Busy Bee,” smiled Tom. “Doesn’t she always improve each shining minute?”

“I didn’t know about improving shining minutes, but I think I can improve my shining nose,” Bee announced. “Supper most ready, Katie?” she called from the stairs. “We’re all afther shtarvin’ to death.”

“Oh, let’s have it here in front of the fire!” Jeanne cried suddenly, clapping her hands.

"Picnic style. On the floor. It'll be so warm."

"Oh, say! Have a heart!" Ruth groaned. "I've never chopped wood before in my life and I feel strangely desirous of sitting on a comfortable chair."

"Why not roll the table in?" Jack observed. "It'll get through the double doors all right ——"

"And it's set ——" M'amselle added quietly.

No sooner said than done. The boys leaped to push back against the wall the living-room furniture and make room for the big dining table. Then they pulled and pushed it into the living-room before the roaring fire. Plates rattled and cups danced and Tom made himself ridiculous by prancing about, squealing in a falsetto voice in a pretended agony of terror lest everything be broken. Finally, however, the table and its contents came to a standstill without any serious damage being done, and the boys and girls hurried away to clean up before the meal proper should appear.

Katie had planned the most popular menu for a cold night. A creamed macaroni dish seasoned with tomatoes and cheese and crisped

over the top with brown bread crumbs, and hot chocolate with corn bread. For dessert an apple tapioca pudding with hard sauce. Only four articles but they were all filling. All hot and all guaranteed to satisfy the appetites of the hungry workers.

When the meal was finally finished, the table looked a wreck. Not a crumb could be found to feed even a bird. And the boys and girls were too content to move from their chairs. They sat about talking idly for almost an hour while Katie patiently trotted to and from the kitchen cleaning away the debris.

Then someone suggested cards.

They started the wild and childish game of "Slap Jack." This served to wake them all up, and following that came a lively half hour with "Up, Jenkins!" Then they voted for a little music, so the boys pushed the table back again into the dining-room while the girls swept the crumbs into the fireplace. Then the fire was replenished and the crowd settled itself in comfortable positions while Ruth went to the piano. Jack strummed lightly on a mandolin and led the singing but as none of them were really gifted with melodious voices

except him, they one by one fell silent and listened in pleasure to his sweet tenor.

Finally Ruth left the piano and as she did so she switched out the last electric light and curled up on the broad couch with the two other girls. Tom was stretched out in a big easy chair. Harry and Steve sprawled flat on the floor in the full blaze of the firelight and Jack sat withdrawn a little in the shadows.

He sang until his voice and his repertoire gave out, then he laid the mandolin down and a little silence fell on the group.

They were all of them thinking of Carol. It had not seemed quite right that they should all be having this wonderful time when Carol was going through deep waters. But Jeanne had decided with Bee that it was best for them to get back into a normal, happy atmosphere as soon as possible. It would be easier to swing Carol into it on her return, and might be the kindest way of helping her through a difficult time. So she had been the one to lead them back to light-hearted gaiety in the days that followed after her tumble over the cliff and though her heart had often ached for her friend

while she appeared to be the most forgetful, there was not one of her guests who misunderstood, or who failed to help her in her undertaking. It was Jack now, who broke the little silence that seemed to settle like a cloud over their hilarity. He leaned out of the darkness and handed a penny to Jeanne for her thoughts.

“I was thinking of what you said, Jack, as you came in from the spring. ‘If the road to success is easy’—and I was wondering just what roads we’d each taken and how far we’d get on them.”

“An interesting speculation,” Jack said.

“Don’t you wish we could see down the roads?” Bee began eagerly but Steve stopped her.

“Suppose Carol had seen? Or Jeanne? Or Jack?”

“Going it blind is bad enough ——” Harry agreed, then stopped suddenly, thinking of Jack’s eyes.

“Supposing,” Jack said quickly, with that easy light touch of his that never failed him in moments of embarrassment for others—“supposing I turn prophet for the rest of the even-

ing and look into the future and tell you what I see."

"Oh, can you?" Ruth cried. "How?"

"Assuredly," Jack said gravely, "I can do it by cards or palms. Which do you prefer?"

They chose palms as being the most interesting and Jeanne laid her slim white one first in Jack's outstretched hand. He bent with it toward the light of the fire and began in all solemnity.

"This is the hand of an adventurer in life. High seas, lonely trails, foreign tribes, sickness, danger—nothing frightens her. If she has a goal in sight she presses sturdily on, overcoming with an indomitable spirit all obstacles ——"

"That's my past," Jeanne slyly observed. "Tell me something I don't know."

"Hush," Jack reproved. "Your past has to come before your present, and long before your future."

He paused and scrutinized the hand that lay in his, turning it this way and that, opening the fingers and measuring the thumb, gravely.

"I foresee more travelling, more friends, more trouble. There is no special talent for

anything, no gift for anything—but friendship. But that, my child, you have in rich abundance. Treasure it. Use it. It is your house of gold.”

Jeanne withdrew her hand as he finished.

“Your price?”

Jack leaned forward suddenly.

“A kiss.”

Jeanne regarded him disdainfully.

“It wasn’t worth it. See if you have better luck with someone else!” And she jumped lightly to her feet and let Bee take her place.

“Ah! The Busy Bee!” Jack took her hard, brown little hand and examined it with interest.

“Capability — fearlessness — the will and courage to fight. I see them all in this little hand. A keen interest in life. A warm loyal heart ——”

“That’s Bee. Not Bee’s future ——” Jeanne broke in. “Jack, you have no imagination.”

Jack peremptorily ordered her to silence.

“Hist! Wait! List! My imagination is just getting warmed up.” He bent over Bee’s hand, closed his eyes and droned out:

"This girl will travel to foreign lands. She will disguise herself as a Spanish princess and will marry the Duke of Afghanistan. She will then discover that America, the Gem of the Ocean, is the best little old place after all and she'll come home and settle down to the business of lassoing American men for work on her ranch."

"That's better," Bee smile

"My price has been quoted," Jack said with dignity.

Bee leaned forward and touched her brother's lips lightly.

"The bee always has to gather honey," she murmured.

"Hey!" Harry rolled over and sat up suddenly. "I say! Let's take turns playing Prophet. No fair."

"I agree with you," Tom said, "but it's my turn. Superiority of age," he explained coolly to an indignant Harry and he quietly shoved Jack back in the corner, took his place and beckoned to Ruth.

With the color coming richly up in her face, Ruth left the couch and sat down on the floor near Tom, putting her hand out to his.

“A soft, warm, friendly hand. A beautiful hand. A hand that can evoke rapture by its skillful touch on the piano. A hand that can evoke oceans of praise by its deftness at the skillet. A hand meant for ——”

“—apparently for holding,” Harry observed grumpily.

“Exactly,” Tom agreed.

“But evidently,” Ruth said quietly, “not a hand that reveals much of my future.” She started to withdraw it.

“Ah, yes.” Tom clutched it again. “Wait. The future is all in the fingers. Your palm holds your past. Your fingers grope and stretch for things out of reach.” He nudged Jack and said aside, “That’s a good line, Jack. You want to remember that. Good line.”

Then he went on.

“These fingers are reaching surely and strongly for fine and beautiful things, and these fingers will get them. Fine friendships, a broad education in music, a trip abroad ——”

Ruth gasped.

“Like that, eh?” Tom asked. “Well, all right. Wait a minute. I’ll think up another just as good.”

"Now you've spoiled it," Ruth cried. "I was almost believing you." She sighed and held her hand out before her. "If they could only get all they wanted ——"

Tom leaned forward, a provocative light in his eyes.

"What do they want to get right now?" he asked. ("Watch me, Harry. This is how you do it. Easy money. See 'em fall.")

"Just this."

Ruth suddenly thrust her fingers in his red hair so close to hers and gave his head a vigorous yank. The surprise of it left him speechless for a moment while Harry rolled about in mirth.

"Easy money! Watch me! The girls all get in line to kiss me," he quoted. His jeering triumph gave Tom an excuse to vent his feelings. He pounced on Harry and punched him properly. There ensued a vigorous wrestling match which only ended when Harry rolled so close to the fire that his coat touched the warm ashes and Steve smashed his hand down on the glowing sparks that were burning a little hole.

"Come, children. Come. Enough of this

nonsense," he growled. "It's past eleven and I'm for going to bed."

"Boo! I hate to leave this fire for a cold room up-stairs," Jeanne sighed as she rose and stood still in its warm circle.

"That's where we boys have one on you. We can undress by the fire. Sleep here if we want."

"That's a good idea. You can take turns keeping it replenished all night," Ruth said. "Excellent. I make that a motion and second it."

"I'm going to make another motion," Tom said deliberately, his eyes on Ruth, and with the words he stepped forward, put an arm about her and kissed her full on the mouth. The surprise of it held Ruth still a minute and before anyone could see the sudden glad light that sprang to her eyes, Jack said quickly:

"I second that motion, Tom."

And he stepped up to Jeanne and claimed the full price of his fortune telling.

With a wink at each other, Harry and Steve moved each to a side of M'amselle, bent forward and left a warm kiss on each cheek. She flung an arm about each and drew their faces

down to her and gave them each a resounding kiss in return.

“ Ah! I tell you the French people know how. You girls ought to take lessons,” Harry cried with satisfaction.

“ It is not that we do not know how,” Jeanne said gently, “ but it is simply that we know the American boys value what they do not get at the first time.”

CHAPTER XVIII

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

BEFORE Carol and Mrs. Stafford returned Jeanne was able to remove her head bandage. She wore her hair low over the healing wound and bound it in place with a broad ribbon so that her mother should not see it at once and become alarmed when she and Ruth and Bee went down to the station to meet the train.

Carol, who had always appeared like a bright bird among them in her lovely clothes, was dressed in black. It seemed to make a great change and Bee and Ruth hung back in conscious shyness as they saw her moving toward them, but when Jeanne brought her back to the car and she stretched out a hand silently to them, her lovely eyes brimming with tears, they forgot the strangeness of her and gave her their love and sympathy in a warm rush.

“It’s good to see you again, Carol.”

“We’ve missed you.”

"It's wonderful," Carol said smiling bravely, "to have you people to come back to."

She had dreaded meeting them all, but with the girls staying close by her she found it not so difficult after all. Steve and Harry were both dumb. They simply wrung her hand and turned away abruptly. Tom let his blue eyes speak for him while his lips made ordinary conversation. Jack was the only one who mentioned her sorrow and he waited for a moment before supper when the others had not yet appeared. Carol, who had no other black dress to change into, came down-stairs first and went out on the porch. Soon she heard the tap-tap of Jack's cane, then he came and stood beside her.

"I just wanted to say, Carol, that it does a fellow good to see a girl like you, who isn't used to hard knocks, rise to meet them as bravely as you have. I'm proud to know you, Carol." He put out a hand gravely.

A flush spread over Carol's face. She put her hand in his quietly without looking at him. Then she said:

"It was all because of you, Jack. You and

Jeanne. You expected me to. I felt that. No one else ever expected anything big or brave of me. They always expected—just the opposite ——” Her voice broke. Then she looked up and smiled quickly as she ended:

“ *I am happy to know you.*”

It was inevitable that after supper they should sit quietly on the porch and begin to talk about the fall that lay ahead of them. The summer was practically over. In two days Tom Kelly returned. In three the twins and Ruth would take their departure. The Allens and Vic and Ted were gloomily lamenting the fact that they had just one week left.

“What about you people, Jeanne? How long are you going to stay up here?” Ted asked.

Jeanne shrugged.

“I have been so busy living through this summer that I have not once thought of the end of it. What do we do, *cherie*?” she called softly to her mother who was conversing in low tones with M’amselle.

At her question Mrs. Stafford rose and came over to join the young people. She stood, despite Jack’s urging, behind his chair, a hand on

his shoulder to keep him in his seat, and she smiled about on the boys and girls who had grown so dear to her this summer.

“It is horrid to talk of leaving when we have all of us so recently learned how to get on together.”

Brave Mrs. Stafford. No one but she would have dared refer so delicately to the difficulties of adjustment that the weeks had brought to each of them. But she was sure of her moment and sure of her girls and she made no mistake. They smiled comprehendingly at her or each other and she went on:

“I have been looking forward to this moment all summer because I knew when it came the time for saying good-bye was going to be hard for all of us. One hates to let go a good time. One hates to bid farewell to friends.”

“Second the motion,” Tom grumbled softly and they all laughed.

“I’m sorry, Tom, I didn’t work out as happy a scheme for you boys as I finally succeeded in doing for the girls, but if you *will* be boys ——”

“Mother Stafford!” Jeanne rose to her

feet and moved over to confront her adopted parent. "What is it? What under the sun are you leading up to say?"

Mrs. Stafford's eyes twinkled.

"I have consulted Jack, regarding Bee's future. I have made a flying trip to Ruth's mother. I have telegraphed and telephoned for endless hours and innumerable times and the end of the whole business is ——"

By this time the girls were all on their feet, clustering about Mrs. Stafford in a flutter of excitement. All but Carol who stood quietly, her face shining. Mrs. Stafford looked down at her.

"Shall we tell them?"

Carol nodded.

"Of course they may not like it," Aunt Bee suggested, postponing the revelation mischievously.

"One second more and I'll choke you, Aunt Bee!" Bee cried.

"Help!" Mrs. Stafford suddenly ducked in a most undignified way and ran from the porch into the cottage. Before anyone could catch her she had disappeared and Carol was left to break the news. She was more

excited than anyone had ever seen her, and sat clasping and unclasping her hands as she talked.

"Well," she began, "I do hope you'll all like the idea. Because it's really mine. Of course if you don't, you simply have to say so, and nobody need go."

"Go!"

"Where?"

"Hurry, Carol! This suspense is killing me!"

"You see, I presented a problem at once. Of course Aunt Bee is my guardian and my home is with her, but I couldn't very well keep on going to the private school I've always gone to in Chicago, and yet live with Aunt Bee in New York. So I suggested—I always hated my old school anyhow—that Aunt Bee find a boarding-school near New York and let Jeanne go there with me this winter."

Jeanne drew an ecstatic breath.

"Fun!" she murmured.

"Then when we got that much decided we didn't see why Ruth and Bee shouldn't come along too!"

Sharp exclamations from the other two girls.

Bee turned inquiringly to Jack who nodded silently and Ruth sat like a statue, her great eyes glowing in her face like two lamps.

“And we discovered that Ruth hated her old High School as much as I had hated mine,” Carol went on. “And we also discovered that Jack and his mother and father were wondering how, when and where Bee was to continue her education as the little old schoolhouse burned to the ground this summer, Bee, and your teacher has gone home to California again.”

“You never told me,” Bee said accusingly to Jack.

“Forgive me, sis. They wouldn’t let me. They wanted to spring this surprise stunt.”

“So,” Carol concluded with a mighty sigh and an expansive grin, “we got it all fixed up for everybody to go with me to boarding-school at Doane’s Landing next winter.”

“Carol! You’re a genius!” Jeanne cried.

Ruth remained silent, but she stretched out a hand and gave Carol’s a big squeeze, and Carol, with that new discernment that had come to her, understood and gave back a

friendly pressure of comprehension. In a way this plan for the winter was to mean more to Ruth than anyone.

Bee, too, was silent, bewildered and not a little upset at the news that she was not to go back to Montana to her parents until the following June. In the hubbub of questions that Ruth and Jeanne flung at Carol, Jack's quiet aside to Bee was unheard.

"Stiffen up, girlie. It's what Dad and Mother have wanted for you. Aunt Bee is making it possible, of course, and Carol is financing Ruth. It'll do you all good to get away to school together and you know I shall be flitting about the country. I'm not going to take root in Montana again. I shall probably be in or near New York through most of the winter."

"I hadn't thought of that, Jack."

"And next summer, if you like, the whole quartette may strike the trail for the shanty out West. How about it, Bee? That's not a bad idea. Spring it on 'em."

So Bee turned at last just as Carol was beginning to get anxious about her enthusiasm and spoke with eagerness.

“All right, Carol. You’ve sprung a good idea, but you’ve only sprung half of it.”

“What did I leave out?” Carol demanded.

“A trip to Montana after Commencement in June and a house party out there all summer. You’re all invited.” Bee warmed to her subject and flung an arm inclusively at the company. “I’ll take you duck hunting in a canvas boat. I’ll take you riding for miles up mountains where your horses will climb like goats and over streams they will have to swim while you fold your feet around the horses’ necks to keep them dry.”

“The necks or the feet?” Tom inquired.

Bee hushed him with a glance.

“I’ll take you to a country dance. Everyone goes. Families, including babies and grandparents. The babies and grandparents go to bed up-stairs on the floor and the young people move all the furniture out from downstairs—including the stove ——”

“Bee! What are you giving us?”

“The truth. And you’ll have to wash at a pump outdoors ——”

“We’re coming, Bee!” Jeanne cried. “It all sounds too adventuresome for anything.”

“Think of it,” Ruth said in her dignified way. “A year at boarding-school. And a trip out West at the end of it. Why, I never *dreamed* anything like that could happen to me.”

Just then Mrs. Stafford came out.

“Well—what do you think of the scheme?” she asked.

The girls all rushed at her. All but Ruth who sat still, detained by Tom’s voice.

“In your meanderings don’t forget—

“I’m your he
You’re my she ——”

She turned on him swiftly.

“As if I’d *ever* forget that, Tom Kelly. As if I’d *ever* forget that.”

CHAPTER XIX

A FAREWELL PARTY

THERE must be,—the decision was unanimous,—a farewell party. But when it came to deciding just what sort of a party it was to be there was, of course, dissension. The twins wanted another day for sailing but it was pointed out that one could never rely on the weather and there was just one day left for them to revel in, so that project was dropped. The Allen girls thoughtlessly suggested another picnic at Glen Lake but Ted and Vic vetoed that idea with prompt efficacy. A dance at the Park didn't seem like enough of a celebration because they had gone there so much.

“The trouble is we've done everything,” Jeanne sighed to her mother when they were alone together. “There's nothing new left.”

“Did it ever occur to you, Jeanne, that you have had a party everywhere except in our own cottage?”

"Why, no. It never did."

"Why don't you suggest a Stunt Party? Invite the whole Point, young and old, and have each one come prepared to suggest a game or do a stunt of their own. You could, in that way, have a very varied program, I should think."

Jeanne considered this with growing enthusiasm.

"A costume party!" she finally cried. "For the young people, anyway!"

It was suggested to the others, who fell in with the plan at once, and a babble of excitement arose over the problem of costumes.

"A costume is enough to puzzle over," Tom groaned, "but a stunt, too, is almost too much for me."

The news was broadcast in short order, and the girls immediately got busy on preparations. They decided the cottage should be trimmed, so a committee was appointed, consisting of Tom, Carol and Bee, to decorate the house and porch. Ruth and Jeanne and the twins were to help Katie with refreshments.

Jack was named Master of Ceremonies to

work out an Order of Proceedings and keep things going.

The invitations were given out in the morning and by night costumes, house, refreshments and program were to be ready. It meant lively work.

The twins were set to making ice-cream. They borrowed freezers from their neighbors, carted ice from the ice house themselves on wheelbarrows and stuck faithfully to their jobs all the morning. Once Jeanne dared to remark that they seemed to feel the need to do a good deal of tasting. And Ruth added that probably they'd be through quicker if they didn't take the covers off so much. At which insulting suggestions the boys departed in high dudgeon and the girls had to run after them and on bended knees made due apologies.

Katie was making cookies and cakes and Ruth helped her. Jeanne and Mrs. Stafford were busy cleaning up the cottage and getting the regular meals for their large family. All four of them washed up dishes.

"A punch too?" Jeanne asked.

"It's a good deal of work, 'dear, but if you want it we can fix up an easy one; ginger ale

and lemonade together are delicious. But I don't really think we need it. Do you? And it will add enormously to the dish washing."

Jeanne finally agreed not.

"Let's see. How many of us will there be?"

She began to count up.

"Six from the Allens'. Nine of us here. That's fifteen. Four from the Van Tynes'—nineteen. And if all the other children and older people come—why, about thirty! What a crowd! We won't have chairs enough."

"You young people will have to sit on the floor."

By three o'clock the ice-cream was made and four freezers were covered over with heavy blankets in the cool corner under the back porch. Platters of crisp brown cookies and two huge cakes, one chocolate and one frosted with white icing, filled the pantry shelves. The big living-room had been prettily decorated with branches of autumn leaves and wild flowers for which the decorative committee had scoured the country. Great jars and bowls of it made cheerful splashes of color throughout the room. On the porch Japanese

lanterns had been strung up from pillar to pillar and bobbed about gently in a soft breeze. The workers, weary and hot, sat about complimenting themselves and each other on their speed and ability.

“Costume!” groaned Tom at last.

“Well, I’m for a bathing costume first,” Jack announced. “I have no thoughts further than that.”

“Yeah! Let’s worry a lot and build a house on it,” Harry agreed. He and Steve grinned at each other. They had settled the question of their costumes early in the morning and were comfortably at ease about it.

So the question of fancy dress—so absorbing to the girls and so obnoxious to the boys—was laid on the table for two hours while they all went swimming. It was the “last” swim, as it was getting to be the “last” of so many things, and each one felt the pleasure should be prolonged a little longer.

By five-thirty, however, the last one was out of the water and back in his room dressing for the party. Hoots and jeers came up from the boys’ rooms and ecstatic squeals of delight were wafted down from the girls up-stairs. The

buffet supper, agreed upon early in the day, had been standing in the dining-room fully half an hour before anyone was ready to appear. And even after doors did open and figures emerge so much time was spent in viewing and applauding that it was after seven before Mrs. Stafford could get them down to the important business of consuming sandwiches and milk and fruit. She finally achieved it by summoning Katie and ordering her to carry away all the food untouched, at which there was a great roar of protest from the boys, shrieks from the girls and a concerted and instant scramble for the dining-room.

The guests came early and were ushered into the big living-room where the older people, who had not dressed in costume, were seated in chairs and the younger ones dropped on the floor. Then Jack, Master of Ceremonies, rose to his feet and read the evening's program which he had cleverly written in verse. At the end of it, after enthusiastic applause had died, he announced each "Stunt" and as no one was sure on whom he would next spring, it kept the young people in a continual flutter of excitement.



HIS SHARE IN THE DANCE WAS NEGLIGIBLE

“The opening number on our program for this evening’s entertainment will be the Pony Ballet. The Double Twins will render us a charming little song and dance with Miss Ruth Winfield accompanying at the piano.”

This Jack announced with all the dignity and formality he could summon. Ruth went to the piano and played through a line of popular songs. Jack folded back a screen and in pranced the four boys—Ted and Vic, Harry and Steve. At least Vic, Harry and Steve pranced but Ted was still limping and his share in the dance was negligible. They were all dressed in short pink ballet skirts with low necked and short sleeved bodices. About their heads they had bound broad pink ribbons and tied them in flaring bows over their foreheads. Pink socks tumbling over white sneakers completed their costumes.

They were solemn as they could be while they pirouetted and smiled and tossed kisses and went through all the feminine tricks before and during their song, but they nearly brought down the house when they began to dance, laboriously and awkwardly going through some

simple steps Ruth had endeavored to teach them.

They were applauded thunderously and had to come back for an encore. They sang a simple little verse, each of them saying a word in turn in unblinking, staccato fashion until the whole of the silly ditty was done. Then they repeated their dance and came out bowing profusely to the assembled audience as they took their seats on the floor.

Ruth was announced next and she rose in her gypsy costume and with a little smile at all the people behind her went to the piano and played some of the music she had studied. It was the first time any one had heard her play anything but ragtime and they were all surprised and pleased as much by Ruth's unconsciousness and simplicity as by her music.

The Allen girls were introduced as Magic Mind Readers and had the audience completely puzzled by a very simple trick. One of the girls went out of the room and the other then shook hands with some one of the crowd. Dorothy would then reënter, would listen while her sister said solemnly:

“Round and round goes the magic circle!”

Upon the word circle her swinging arm would pause and her finger pointed—anywhere. Then Dorothy would move forward and shake hands with the identical person with whom her sister had shaken hands.

Over and over they did this and finally they had to tell the assembled gathering that the mysterious “magic circle routine” had nothing to do with it. Grace always shook hands with the last person to speak before Dorothy left the room. They had dressed themselves all in white with hooded heads and covered faces to look like soothsayers.

The Allen boys were dressed in their girl cousins’ clothes and did a trick with a string. They tied their hands together about the wrist and then asked the people to tell them how to get themselves apart without breaking the string or tying themselves in knots too. They obeyed everyone’s instructions until instructions gave out then they slipped the string in some simple way and unloosened themselves without any effort at all.

Jeanne had dressed as a Red Cross nurse and recited a poem. Carol was arrayed in a multitude of gay clothing collected from various

and sundry sources, and the whole presented a very pleasing effect. She purposed to be a Spanish girl and with Ruth again at the piano she gave a really fine exhibition of fancy dancing. She interpreted the moods and character of a Spanish girl by manipulating a lovely big shawl in petulance and disdain and pride. It was a quite remarkable copy of one of the foremost stage dancers of the time.

Bee was dressed in her khaki riding trousers and with her sombrero on her short dark hair, gay handkerchief knotted around her neck and leather riding boots on she cut quite a picturesque little figure. She swung a lariat for their entertainment and quite amused the gathering when she lassoed the unsuspecting Jack and Jeanne as they stood talking quietly in a corner and dragged them both, with arms bound tight to their sides, to the center of the room. It was difficult for her to do her stunt in the living-room, big as it was, but she gave them a fair idea of her skill and had all the boys open-mouthed with astonishment and admiration.

Tom, in his sailor's uniform for which laziness he had been scathed and scorned and

frowned upon, did a Sailor's Hornpipe. And Jack, who had rigged himself up like Robinson Crusoe or any other romantic character you might choose to call him, simply stood up before these people and told them some of his experiences. He stuck to the funny ones, and had them in gales of helpless laughter but when he came back to his place Jeanne whispered knowingly:

“But, Jack, that is the least of all you have known. Is it not so?”

He simply smiled at her and shook his head in reproach as if to say that this was not an occasion for anything solemn or sad.

After the individual stunts were over, they all gathered about the piano and sang loudly and lustily while the refreshments were being served to the older people, and even when they held their own plates in their hands, they sang on, loath to stop what they kept assuring themselves and each other was fine harmony.

It did not take long for the ice-cream and cake to disappear and after that the older people went out to the porch while the younger ones rolled up the rugs and danced. But a

big moon lifted itself from the blackness of the lake about half-past ten, and lured by its brilliance they all went outdoors. Some of the older people had left and the young crowd dispersed itself on cushions and hammocks and with the thrumming of a ukulele and intermittent singing keeping up the undertone, they talked until almost midnight. Then Mrs. Stafford had to take matters in her own hands and laughingly send the guests home, after they had cheered in shouts that set the echoes to ringing for "Jeanne's House Party."

CHAPTER XX

BREAD AND BUTTER LETTERS

JEANNE was left all alone in the white cottage on the lake. The Allens' house was closed. The Van Tynes' was having the last shutter nailed on as she sat there watching Ted and Vic hurrying around doing the final necessary things. They came over in a few minutes, looking very strange in their well-pressed city clothes. Ted mopped a hot forehead and sat at ease but Victor was constrained.

"Must be the clothes," Jeanne ventured mischievously. "All dressed up and nothing to say."

Vic grunted, then grinned.

"You're about right. Gosh! I hate to go back. It's been a wonderful summer. S'pose you'll be back up next year, Jeanne?"

"I don't know, Vic. There seems to be a plan afoot for us all to go out to Montana to

visit Bee. I'd be a little sorry not to get here. Still—Montana sounds adventurous!”

“Let's go and get a job on a ranch somewhere, eh, Vic?” Ted suggested.

“Oh, do!” Jeanne clapped her hands. “On Jack's ranch. Why not? Then if only we could get Tom there ——”

Mrs. Stafford appeared laughing in the doorway.

“Jeanne, you are impossible.”

“Well,” Jeanne cried defiantly, “it may happen. Anything may.”

“To you—yes,” Vic agreed. “We'll never get there.”

“You've got to *want* to,” Jeanne flashed. “And want to, and believe you're going to, and then start. Don't I know?”

Mrs. Van Tyne called. The boys rose regretfully. Good-byes were difficult enough without the handicap of awkward youth but somehow they were said, and Jeanne was left, a lonely figure on the porch, waving good-bye to the Van Tynes' automobile until it disappeared from sight.

“Thank goodness, *cherie*, we'll be off tomorrow.” Jeanne flung an arm about her

mother. "This is a dreadful place to be alone in!"

For Jack had taken Bee and Carol down to New York with him where they were being chaperoned in a big hotel by M'amselle. Bee had to go ahead to buy some clothes for the school year and had wanted Carol's advice. So with M'amselle to keep a watchful eye on the purchases and Jack to give the girls a good time in between shopping expeditions, they had gone gaily off.

Ruth had left a day previous to their departure, bravely accompanied by the twins, Harry and Steve, and Tom. Harry and Steve were to be with her only part of the way but Tom was going all the way to Ruth's house to meet her mother.

Thinking of all these things, Jeanne suggested after lunch that they drive down for the mail. The girls should have had time to write by now. But Mrs. Stafford was too busy closing up the cottage and needed her chauffeur so Jeanne finally got out her white canoe and paddled all alone down the creek to the little village.

She was delighted to find a letter from each

of the three girls and one from Jack and Tom too. She decided not to read them until she got back in her canoe and there, with the little boat drifting along under overhanging willows, she opened up the letters. Jack's first.

“DEAR JEANNE:

“Here we are—or rather I am—waiting for Bee and Carol to put in an appearance before we go out to dinner somewhere. Bee has gotten so fussy about her clothes you wouldn't know her. You wouldn't anyway, because you've hardly seen her in anything but bloomers, bathing suit or sailor dresses. She's got two or three rigs now I'll have to leave her to describe, that make her look a picture. She's as proud as a little peacock, and I believe Carol when she tells me it's Bee has kept me waiting—not she.

“Carol is enjoying Bee's pleasure too, and takes a 'hind seat in an amazingly graceful way, all things considered. I think you girls are going to have a wonderful old year together at school and I'm awfully glad you're to have it. There's nothing like tying up tight to the friends you love, and you're all of you peaches.

“Tom is to join us to-night and will bring the latest word from Ruth. He goes back to

service to-morrow so this is his last fling. There's just one thing missing from the party to-night and that's you. I wish you were with us. I miss you. How can I tell you what the visit up at Lake Sunnapine did for me? I got there pretty tired out with the tussle of fighting and nearly dying and living again. And the road ahead looked long and lonely and dark. And somehow, I can't just say how, you lit it up for me while I was with you, and now, even though I won't see you again for a long time, it is not nearly so long or so lonely and it will never again be dark. Thank you, and bless you. And think once in a while in the midst of your fun and frolics next year of

“Your faithful,

“JACK.”

“As if,” Jeanne murmured, “as if I could ever forget him. Ever. *Ever*. Oh! but I'm glad if I did do that nice thing for him, though I don't see how ——”

She mused for a while, her hand trailing over the side of the boat amongst the water lilies. Then she picked up her paddle and drove her canoe on for a way. But soon she ceased effort and picked up another letter from her lap. It was from Tom.

“DEAR JEANNE:

“I always was a dub at writing letters and when it comes to ‘thank you’ ones, I’m worse than a ship at sea in a storm. Anyway, you know what a corking time I had with you and how much I appreciated being included among your friends, so it’s silly to waste time saying it over again.

“I got Ruth home all right and met the family. Had supper with them in fact and witnessed their astonishment when Ruth broke the news about school. She and her mother had kept it a secret from the others. They’re all delighted, especially Mrs. Winfield. She can’t get over the change in Ruth.

“‘It’s not that she looks so different, though she does, or dresses so different, though she’s done that too with the same clothes—I don’t know how—but she is different,’ she said over and over.

“Ruth walked with me to the station and here I am writing this on the train to New York. I’ll mail it as soon as I get in. Expect to meet Jack and the girls to-night.

“Well, Jeanne, it’s a long way back to the time I hauled you up over the side of the ship on the rope, isn’t it? And a lot has happened to you since then. And I suppose lots will happen. I hope, though, you won’t forget me no matter how far you travel or how many

people you meet. Because *I'll* never forget you.

“With many, many thanks again—

“Your friend,

“TOM KELLY.”

“Nice Tom,” Jeanne smiled. “He’s the best friend I have. Well, I might as well finish this right here now because I’m dying of curiosity to hear what the girls say.”

She opened Ruth’s next.

“DARLING JEANNE:

“I can hardly believe I am home again and that the summer is really gone by. I looked forward to it so *hard* and it was so wonderful after all. But as I think about it now I can see that all the dreadful first part *had to be*. I had to grow out of it. I couldn’t have jumped into being the person I was after—well, after Tom came—right at the start. I couldn’t. I can’t explain this, but I mean something like this. Life is so slow and then again it’s so fast! It’s slow when you aren’t right inside yourself, and fast when you are.

“Tom and I had a wonderful talk after the twins left us. He’s the best friend a girl could have. He just talks like a big brother—yet he’s not a big brother so I can talk back to him.

I'm awfully happy to know him so well. And of all the happiness that's come to me this wonderful summer at your lovely house party, I really think knowing Tom is the biggest and best part. And on top of and close to that is knowing you. It's precious to think I shall have a winter at school with you next year because I have the feeling that we've just begun knowing each other, and I want to keep on.

"I've got to get busy now and cook and clean and sew. I've got some busy weeks ahead of me but I shan't mind them at all, because of what's ahead. Do write me once before you leave the lake and tell me you understand that I had a *prayerful* time at your house party even though I can't say it right at all.

"A heartful of love from

"RUTH."

"JEANNE, YOU OLD DEAR:

"Why aren't you here? Oh! I wish you were. I'm so all dressed up in wonderful new clothes that I can't bear to sit down—they're so scrumptious. Jack laughs at me all the time. He'll say it's my primping has kept him waiting for me, but it's not—this time! It's this letter to you. Carol's writing too.

"Time has gone so fast and we've seen and bought so much and played so hard that I shall be glad to stop. I think of the blessed quiet

blueness and greenness at Lake Sunnapine and honestly, I'd give a good deal for a day there! But never mind. This is a whirl but it's part of life for me just now so I take it gladly.

"Carol has been darling. I don't know what I'd have done without her. Lost my head, probably, and bought the first things I saw—they all seemed gorgeous—and in the end would have looked much as you tell me you did after your shopping expedition with the good old captain.

"But this isn't to be a detailed account of me and my doings which I shall have to tell you anyway in a few days when we all gather at Aunt Bee's home up the Hudson before starting for school—it's a bread and butter letter.

"Honestly, Jeanny—as Katie says—it was a wonderful house party you were afther havin', and the best 'av it was yer own swate silf. How you ever kept cool and patient and sweet when everything and everybody was going wrong, I don't see. But wasn't it wonderful the way things turned out? It was—as Carol tells me—an *experience* for her. And I guess it was for Ruth. And I shouldn't wonder if next year at school will be an experience for me because I've never been to one as you three have. I've just ridden horseback to a shack where a dozen children all ages and

sizes got together. This will be different certainly. And I know it will be hard and lonely but I shan't mind a bit if you will stick close by me. We may room together again, mayn't we?

“ Good-bye, chum—

“ Lots of love,

“ BEE.”

The last one, of course, was from Carol.

“ DEAR JEANNE:

“ In the first place I want to apologize for being such a nuisance and annoyance the first part of my visit to you. I suppose if I were with you I'd never get this said even if I were bursting with the ache of it. But now that I am miles away, I write it. Rather cowardly, I suppose, but it's the best I can do.

“ I haven't any excuse except the old one that I didn't know any better. But I am learning a few things, I think. Only when I stop and think how much I have still to learn it's a little bit discouraging. Do you know what I mean? Ruth's known about helping others and giving up for years. Bee's known about being natural and wholesome. And you've learned so much about living,—I think, really, you know all that Ruth and Bee and I know and then some. And that's why you're such a help to all of us.

“ But I guess that’s enough about me.

“ I wish you could see Bee. She looks darling to-night. She’s got on a navy blue dress touched up with scarlet. Her hat is navy with scarlet ribbon on it and her shoes and stockings are black. She’s too adorable, the way she loves herself in the looking-glass and yet the minute we get out anywhere, she forgets all about her new finery and plumps into painted doorways as though she had on her bloomers and middy unless Jack or I stop her.

“ And Jack, by the way, threatens over the telephone to send in a fire alarm if Bee and I don’t go down to him pretty quick. So I guess we’d better stop.

“ Good-bye, Jeanne dear. Thank you for a wonderful summer that has somehow opened up a new life for me.

“ Lovingly,

“ CAROL.”

Jeanne bunched all the letters in her hand, then she dropped them on her lap again, patted them lovingly and leaned back to look up at the sky. White clouds drifted lazily over a sea of blue. Around the edge of the shore could be seen here and there a few scarlet trees, while on the placid lake floated leaves,—first signs of the end of the summer. Jeanne sighed and smiled.

It was sad—this getting to the end of good times but somehow it always meant the beginning of other ones and already her thoughts were leaping ahead to the reunion with her cousins at boarding school.

She glanced down smilingly again at the letters in her lap. It was almost as if those dear people were with her and had spoken to her.

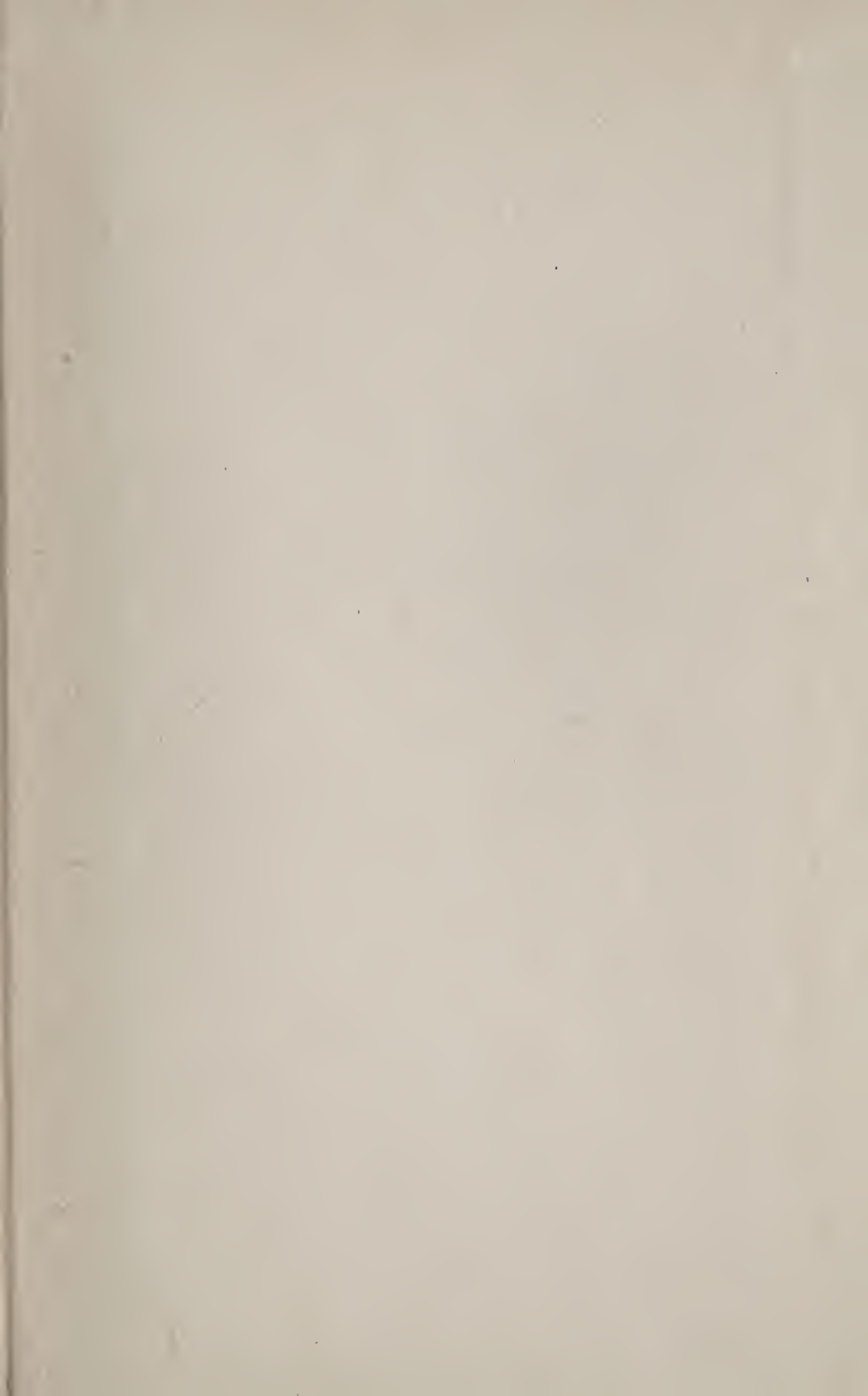
How lucky she was. How *lucky* she was! A successful house party behind her—a wonderful year at boarding-school ahead of her! Life was offering her rich gifts. Jeanne picked up her paddle at last and with a face lit with happiness at memories of the past and anticipation of the future, she pushed her little white canoe toward home.

The Stories in this Series are:

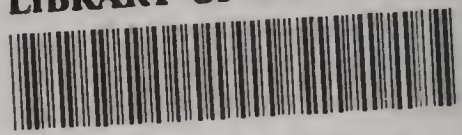
JEANNE

JEANNE'S HOUSE PARTY

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